

博多豚骨 ラーメンズ

HAKATA TONKOTSU RAMENS

4

木崎ちあき
CHIAKI KISAKI



Hakata Tonkotsu Ramens

vol.4

by Chiaki Kisaki

[Novel Updates](#)

Translation Group: [kaedesan721](#)

Epub: [Trollo WN/LN EPUB](#)

Seasonal Opening Ceremony & First Inning

博多豚骨 ラーメンズ4

木崎ちあき
イラスト／一色 箱



Seasonal Opening Ceremony

Yagi had pride in the work he did. As a servant, he would carry out numerous routine tasks – even from preparing the meals to taking care of the house – and sometimes he would eliminate anyone who would threaten the family as a hitman. He dedicated his life from morning to night without question, and it was Yagi's role to protect the head of the family's position and honor. He worked at the Matsuda household on this long year as well, supporting his master publicly and behind the scenes.

The life of a politician was extremely busy, and for Kazuo Matsuda – a member of the Lower House – he was likely to be a pick for the next Cabinet member in this election, and so he had been working tirelessly day in and day out. Yagi caught sight of Kazuo's exhaustion on his face as he entered his private room and set off to prepare pouring him a coffee to help wake him up.

Kazuo was the eldest of a political family. His grandfather was the former prime minister and his father was the former cabinet minister, and he was turning fifty-five this year. Kazuo was only a boy of ten when Yagi began working for this household as a servant. The days and months of these past few decades had flown by; Kazuo had developed visible wrinkles around his face and Yagi's hair had turned completely white.

Kazuo's study was located on the south side of the first floor in an old, three story western-style house on the corner of a high-class residential area in a certain part of the city. Yagi gently knocked on the door, carrying the tray with a cup placed on it with one hand. "Sir, I have brought you your coffee."

"Yeah," He heard Kazuo's exhausted voice reply to him. "Thank you, Yagi."

Yagi opened the door and let himself in. Kazuo sat on a black leather seat, currently in the middle of work. He was typing on his notebook laptop placed on his desk.

And then all of the sudden, something made Kazuo's complexion change.

"Wha-" His eyes widened, and his face contorted into fear.

Just what had happened? Seeing Kazuo terribly shocked by something, Yagi tilted his head and questioned him. "Is something the matter?"

"Look at this."

Yagi did as he was instructed and looked at the screen. The laptop screen had completely froze. It did not respond no matter which key was pressed.

But that was not the only issue. Abruptly the screen turned pitch black and white text appeared in the center.

‘Kazuo Matsuda.’

The characters that appeared were his master’s name.

Did it get hit with a virus? Unable to control the device in front of them, Kazuo and Yagi could only stare, dumbfounded. And then, there was movement on the screen. More sentences appeared after his name.

‘Kazuo Matsuda.’

‘I know your true face.’

‘If you do not wish for it to be known to the world, then send 10,000,000 yen as fast as possible.’

“What is this.....?”

Kazuo muttered next to Yagi, but he could only cock his head, baffled.

His true face – there were too many options that came to his mind for what that could possibly mean. Kazuo had used any means at his dispense in order to survive as a politician.

Yagi had been hired by this household for many years now, and there were very few who attempted to blackmail with Kazuo’s secrets before. The sender of this threat was one of those few people.

However, there was a catch this time. It was different than the usual threats. This was the first time someone had infected his personal laptop with a virus. Yagi had dabbled in various forms of battle up until this point, but he felt a strange uneasiness this time, as though it would only grow worse. He had to dispose of this threat as soon as possible. He existed solely for instances that arose like this.

“Sir,” Yagi addressed him firmly. “Please leave this matter to me.”

His master had faith in Yagi’s work. “I’m counting on you.” Kazuo nodded.

However, no matter how capable Yagi was as a servant or as a hitman, he was a complete novice when it came to computers. He had no other choice but to ask for a professional for help.

Fortunately, he knew of one such person. That man could be able to resolve this. That conceited, unendearing hacker.

The only issue was he had to find where that man was currently.

Top of the First Inning

Daimyo street in the central ward in Fukuoka was overflowing with young people today as well. Enokida met and dined with an acquaintance in a small Italian restaurant at a corner of that street. A man wearing a suit sat across from him on the other side of the round table. He was Karimura, an investigator on the cybercrime countering division. He was still young and appeared to be straightforward and solemn, but he was not someone Enokida could not talk with. There were plenty of investigators who would contact the informants in this city, even a skilled hacker like Enokida. Enokida would periodically meet up with them and exchange information. And sometimes he would indulge in light banter.

“I saw the news earlier. After threatening the murder of a politician, now there’s a threat of an explosion at the Diet?” Enokida said teasingly with a smile. “Must be rough for you guys.”

“Well, it’s part of the job.” Karimura gave a wry smile back.

Recently there had been the succession of threats sent via the internet. Even a bomb disposal unit was dispatched, although they did not find anything potentially dangerous on the site.

“They should just do it without a warning if they mean it. Nine times out of ten, when someone writes a threat on the internet it’s just a joke.”

Since they had to make a detailed report case by case even for a joke, the job of the cybercrime countering division was tough.

“It’s because there may be the chance someone is actually serious. This time it wasn’t.” Karimura spoke as though he knew who was behind it.

“Ah, so you already figured who was behind it? Was it someone on the right?”

“No, just a regular guy. He was a young male who was searching for job and must have given into temptation after not getting any results. We’re hearing the details from the man himself right now.”

“Sounds like a really troublesome guy.”

Enokida scooped up the pasta with his fork while shrugging his shoulders. The food from this restaurant was fairly good. Their ratings varied on the internet, but they were unreliable.

“Speaking of trouble,” Enokida suddenly changed the topic. “About that .mmm.”

.mmm was a free-for-all cyber terrorist organization. The origin of their name was taken from the acronym for World Wide Web and flipped it upside down to implement the idea for ‘a world without internet’ as their slogan. They were a troublesome cracker group that would attack websites throughout the world without discrimination and disable web browsing freely. The size of the organization was said to be around a few thousand people. Because of them, various corporate sites in Japan took damage as of late.

A technician residing in Japan was apparently correlated with the .mmm, and Enokida looked into the man per Karimura’s request. “It was a tough job. A professional’s household had some sturdy walls.”

“Did you get inside?”

“Of course.”

Enokida told him and placed a USB flash drive onto the table.

“This is?”

“A data he had in his possession that is absolutely secretive. He kept this under lock and key, so it was pretty hard to get. I think this will help you.” Enokida smirked. “So would you look over me hacking into a credit card company’s server from last week?”

Karimura gave him a light smile. “That’s not something I can overlook all the time, you know. You don’t even try to hide it.”

Enokida returned to the main topic. “The data seems to be some sort of list, but it’s pass code protected. You guys are more suited in this area, right?”

Karimura nodded. “Our division will break it.”

“Good luck.”

“Thank you for your help as always,” Karimura told him as he put the USB drive into his pocket.

After they finished their meal, Karimura was the first to leave the restaurant. Enokida’s job was done for the day. He did not have anything particular to do, so he decided to return to the internet cafe he was staying at. He walked from Tenjin to Nakasu. Just as he passed by Kokutai-doro avenue, he got an incoming call.

“Hello?”

The caller was Shigematsu.

“Ha?” Enokida came to a stop when he heard what Shigematsu said. *What’s the meaning of this?* His eyes widened in surprise, and he repeated back. “Saitou-kun was arrested?”



“I wasn’t arrested! I went to be questioned voluntarily!” Saitou quickly corrected. “Please don’t assume I’m just a criminal!”

The food stall Genchan was currently being prepared to open for business. The owner, Genzou, was working briskly in front of Saitou, and Martinez was grinning in his seat next to him. Saitou had also taken a seat and explained the details of his day to them. “The police came to my apartment. Someone from the cybercrime countering division.”

“Cybercrime?” The large man next to him questioned back with wide eyes. “What sort of crime were you arrested for?”

“Making threats, obstructing business, and child pornography.....”

Saitou was nearly arrested for sending death threats to a politician, sending a

threat to bomb the Diet, and then possessing large amounts of photos of naked girls and adolescents.

“That’s insane.” Martinez broke into a laugh, his body shaking from it.

“Apparently the death threat to the politician and threat of bombing a building were posts made on the internet from my laptop.”

Naturally, Saitou had no memory of this. He never wrote anything like that or recall opening such platforms those were posted on.

“So I allowed the police to investigate, but that’s when they found a bunch of photos of naked girls on my laptop and-”

“.....You had that kind of preference?”

“No!” Saitou yelled in denial when Martinez glared at him as though he saw him as something unsightly.

“Seems like it was the work of a remote controlled virus.” Genzo had finished his work and chimed into the conversation.

“A remote controlled virus?”

“That’s right. Because your laptop got infected with a virus, it started writin’ all that stuff on its own.” *According to Enokida*, Genzo added.

“I think that one e-mail was the cause of it.” Saitou recalled something. “I was looking for a new job, and I got e-mails from a recruitment site frequently. But one of them was really strange.....”

It was a response from a corporation he did not apply to. Although he had thought it was odd, he still thought he could not let the opportunity pass and downloaded the attached file without precaution. “Enokida said some hacker must have put a virus into that file.”

“What, so it wasn’t Enokida’s work?”

“No it wasn’t.” Genzo replied. “He said, ‘I wouldn’t do such a cheap joke as that.’”

“Someone seemed to have looked at my information too. The laptop itself had stopped responding and started to move on its own.....And it wasn’t just

my laptop but my smartphone as well.”

His unlimited calling app and SNS were taken and used for criminal acts, so Saitou must have been shaken up.

“That culprit took my account and sent pictures of naked middle school girls on it. I was in the middle of questioning with the police, so it was clear it was hacked into.....”

Because of that he was saved. *But what was the culprit’s objective behind it?* Saitou frowned. He felt overwhelmed that someone he did not know was out there controlling people in that manner.

“In short, the blame was placed on you for crimes you didn’t commit because of this guy.”

“That’s right,” Saitou replied, weeping.

“.....That reminds me. There was a story like that in a Jeffrey Deaver work.” Martinez muttered to himself while stroking his chin. “A man who was said to know everything had misused other’s personal data and framed innocent people for the crimes of others.”

“The internet sure is a scary place.” Genzo whispered keenly.

“The investigator seemed to be an acquaintance of Enokida-san, so he really was a huge help.” With the addition of Enokida vouching for him, Saitou was proved innocent. “A hacker and an informant are important to have.”

“Even so,” Genzo suddenly piped up. “Why was Saitou-kun targeted you reckon’?”

“Maybe it was a grudge or just a prank.” Martinez added.

“Either reason is bad.....I’ve had enough of this.”

“That was a disaster for you.” Genzo told him while placing the ramen he made in front of Saitou. “Here, this is my treat. Eat it and feel better.”

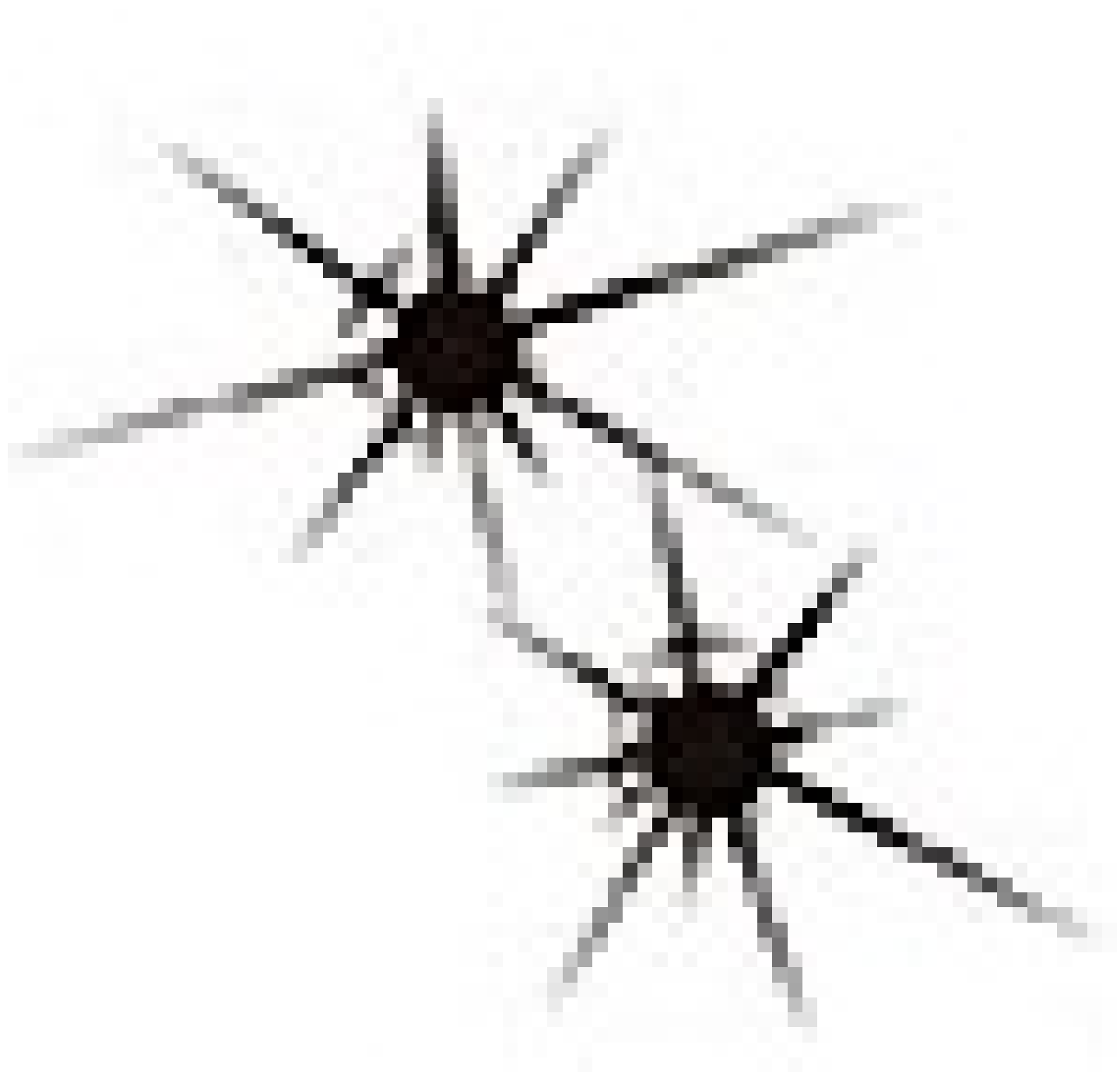
Genzo’s kindness seeped into his heart. Giving his thanks, Saitou brought the noodles to his mouth.

“Now then,” Martinez slowly rose to his feet next to him. “I guess I should get

going.”

“Ah, is it work? You’ve been busy.”

“No,” he held out his hands and shrugged his shoulders. “I haven’t been getting any work recently. So I thought of going to Jiro’s place and see if there’s anything I can do for him.”



His roommate – Zenji Banba – was watching the professional baseball game today as well, placing himself almost directly in front of the TV. While watching him with a cold gaze as he swung between joy and sorrow each time a player made a pitch or swing, Xianming Lin called out to him.

“Hey, Banba.”

Naturally there was no response from him. Banba’s entire focus was on the

game.

“Let’s hurry up to the old man’s place. I’m hungry.”

They had plans to eat dinner at Genzo’s food stall at nine in the evening and to also receive work from him, but Banba would not get up and moving. The match was prolonged, and they well passed their appointment.

“Just wait a sec. It’s gettin’ to the good part.” Banba replied back curtly while still facing the TV screen.

It was the bottom of the twelfth inning with the Hawks on the offense. They were two points behind, but with one out and bases loaded they had a chance. In the batter’s box was the fourth player who had a hit rate of more than thirty percent. The count was one ball and two strikes. They were driven into a corner. The fourth pitch was a two-seam fastball. The batter hit it with a full swing, but it was rough.

‘Ahh! A grounder heading towards the shortstop! Two bases are out! And one more base is out! A double play! That was three outs! The game is finished!’

The voice of the live announcer he heard from the TV was similar to that of a wail.

‘Unable to make a comeback.....The Hawks have ended up with seven consecutive defeats.’

“Aaahhhh!”

Immediately following that statement, Banba’s hollow cry echoed throughout the office. On the TV screen, the players from the team on defense with the lead all gathered at the mound and exchanged high fives to each other for their victory. They then ran quickly back to the benches with lively expressions. Following that, the hero interview with the player that attained victory coming from behind began.

Banba hung his head, holding it in his hands.

‘Now then, let’s review the highlights of today’s match.’

Just as the announcer stated that, Banba had turned off the TV. He then tossed the remote away before wordlessly crawling into his bed and covering

himself all the way over his head with the blanket.

“.....Idiot Ban.” After giving a sigh, Lin called out to him again. “What are you doing? Hurry up and get ready.”

No matter how many times he tried to urge him to get up, Banba did not move.

“Are you listening to me?” He said in a firm voice.

At that, he heard a voice like that of a sob from Banba. “Uugh, seven consecutive defeats.....It’s no use. It’s over.....”

It was the very beginning of September, when the final stage of the professional baseball pennant race was drawing near. However, the number one team Banba supported looked like they were in a slump.

“I thought.....I thought they’d win today.....”

Although they were winning, they ended up losing. At the beginning of the game they had a lead of ten points, so it looked like they could pull it off. Then a very capable pitcher relieved the starting pitcher’s position. The team steadily closed the gap with a barrage of hits and home runs, and although the other team tried to make a swift recovery they were unable to stop their opponent’s momentum. The match was pushed back into an extended game at the top of the ninth inning. Unable to catch up by the top of the twelfth inning, their opponent managed to surpass them following errors made on their part. They had started with a ten point lead but ended two points behind.

“You’re helpless.” Lin shrugged his shoulders, exasperated, and then pulled the blanket off of Banba. “Let’s hurry up and go already. I’ll treat you for today.”

The man, who had curled up like a bagworm, started to slowly but reluctantly get up.



“A class recital?”

In the bar Babylon in Nakasu, Jiro was digesting what Misaki had told him as he wiped down the glasses.

“Yes,” Misaki sat across from him on the other side of the counter, swinging her legs back and forth, and told him about the events going on at her school. “Each class has to do a performance in front of all the students in the school. Something like having a play, a choir, or an ensemble.”

The elementary school Misaki went to had started a new event this year.

“That sounds fun. What is your class going to do?”

“A play. We’re doing the Bamboo Kingdom and the Mushroom Princess.”

“My, I’ve never heard of that story before.” Jiro would have assumed they

would do a famous tale like Momotarou or Snow White.

“It’s because it’s the teacher’s original work.” Misaki told him and took out a booklet from her knapsack. “This is the script.”

Jiro took it from her and glanced through it. It appeared to be a tragic love story between the bamboo prince, Takehiko, and the mushroom princess, Kinomi. The two were in love. However, the two countries were destined to be in war with each other. It was a rather adult story for elementary schoolers to play.

“So, what is your role in it?”

“Kinomi.”

“Oh my, isn’t that the heroine?” Jiro exclaimed. “You did great.”

“It was decided by a draw though,” Misaki replied bluntly. She did not appear to be that happy about her role. She either did not have interest in the play itself or was just shy.

“Even so, that’s amazing. I mean, you’re going to be the only princess among the whole class. You’ve got to try your best.”

“Yeah,” after Misaki gave a small nod she looked up at Jiro with upturned eyes. That was a habit she had when she wanted to ask for a favor. “And so, we have to make our own costumes.”

“A costume for a mushroom princess?”

“Yeah.”

I see. That was what she meant. Jiro understood what she meant to ask of him.

“I got it.” Jiro said proudly. “Leave it to me.”

It was a grand event for his precious daughter. He had to use his skills as a former beauty artist and make the perfect costume for the occasion.

“I’ll make you into a marvelous princess.”

Jiro had stated with self-confidence, but truthfully he was unsure what to do. *What would a princess of a mushroom kingdom look like?*

A mushroom, huh. He whispered to himself. Suddenly, the face of that man with mushroom hair came to his mind.



“Saitou was arrested?”

Lin raised his voice in surprise upon hearing the unbelievable news from Genzo.

“He wasn’t arrested; he went in himself.” Genzo corrected as he made their ramen.

“In either case, that still means he was brought in by the police, right?”

“Well, that is true.”

Genzo said as he placed two bowls of Tonkotsu ramen in front of them. Lin and Banba sat beside each other and placed their hands together, “thank you

for the meal.”

“So?” Lin restarted the conversation while slurping up his firm noodles. “What did Saitou do?”

Genzo told them while listing all of them off on his fingers. “Sent threats, obstruction of business, and child pornography violations.”

“Whoaa……” It was worse than Lin expected. “He’s a helpless scum then.”

“Well, Saitou-kun was innocent. It was all the work of a remote virus.”

According to Genzo, someone controlled Saitou’s laptop by infecting it with a computer virus to use for committing crimes. It was a chilling story.

“More than that,” Genzo suddenly turned towards Banba. “What’s up with you Banba? You ain’t your normal self.”

Banba had the expression as though the world was ending and was doing nothing but sigh. He did not eat much either.

“He’s upset because his team lost seven times in a row.” Lin answered for him.

“That’s just seven loses at most. During their Nankai era they had lost fifteen times in a row.” Genzo laughed. “You gotta support them even when they’re in their slumps. That’s what makes a fan, ain’t that right?”

“.....Yeah, I guess so.” Banba nodded weakly. He then changed the topic to take his mind off of that matter. “Old man, can ya give me a job?”

“Ah, me too.” Lin jumped in on the request.

“Alright, some work for you two. I just got two in today, which would ya like?”

“I don’t really care which.”

“Then how ‘bout we decide on a draw?”

Genzo took out a pen and splittable chopsticks and drew something at the tip of them.

“Alrighty, draw your pick.” He instructed and held out his fist gripping the two chopsticks in front of them. “The client’s contact is written on the tip of the chopsticks.”

Lin reached for the chopstick on the right. “Then I’ll go with this one.”

Banba took the remaining one. “Last but not least.”

“Neither one ain’t a jackpot.” Genzo said jokingly.

Bottom of the First Inning

The plaza in front of Hakata Station was packed with people today as well. They ranged from tourists taking photos in front of statues and monuments to salarymen taking a rest underneath the trees and wiping off their sweat. There were also some families with children tagging along.

Japanese zelkova serrata were flourishing as a lush green around the plaza, and several wooden benches were placed in the area. Chegar sat on one of those benches. He watched the masses of people pass by him in haste as he awaited for the usual man to appear. He looked up at the train station building, squinting from the harsh rays of the sun. The large clock of JR Hakata City indicated it was roughly noon right now – their appointed time to meet up had come.

After a few moments, another man took a seat next to him. The person Chegar was waiting on had arrived. The man was of medium build and had black hair. He was a nondescript middle aged man who wore the same business suit as him.

The man began to speak while still facing forward and away from him. “I got a job for you.”

Chegar did not know his name; he only knew that the man was an executive from the same organization as he was. But Chegar simply followed the orders as an overseas worker under .mmm.

“The target is?” Chegar asked him.

“A hacker named macro-hard. He’s in this city.” The man explained. “He was looking into a politician we support.”

Chegar thought over the name macro-hard in his mind. It was a hacker name he never heard before. “I’ll have Siva look into it right away.”

The other man’s expression clouded over at his words.

“You plan on using that psychopath again?” He replied sternly.

Chegar had two freelance hitmen working under him and utilized them as his hands and feet. This man did not like either of those killers – Siva and Irasawa.

“The hitmen you employ are both crazy.”

That was his excuse. Although that certainly may be the case. They were not like normal people. They were both psychotic and deranged men removed from society. But if Chegar could utilize them effectively, they would be useful.

“Siva’s cracking ability is the best in the world.”

“I have an issue with his personality.”

“A hitman does not have anything like personality.” Chegar held back a sigh. “Besides, it’s better this way than have them against us.”

“And that ex-boxer,” the man rebutted. “Who knows when he’ll be caught.”

The ex-boxer referred to Irasawa.

“Shouldn’t you put him through counseling?”

Chegar got slightly irritated at the man’s question. “And where would the budget for that come from?”

The cyber division comprised of elite hackers and hacker trainees; both were welcomed with open arms, and the spies working overseas were secondary. But support from the organization was insufficient, so it was difficult to keep capable workers. As such it was better to hire cheap hitmen when money was tight. Chegar nearly muttered those complaints.

The man did not say anything more on the matter though. “Don’t screw it up.” That was the only thing he said before leaving and disappearing into the crowd.

After watching him leave, Chegar immediately called those two hitmen.

Chegar himself was also originally from .mmm’s cyber division. They committed repeated terrorist acts via cracking throughout the world, but once they were left with the skills to proceed through the changes in the next era they were ordered to take a backseat five years ago. In actuality that was a DFA.

The only way was up. It was like that in every part of the world. There were an abundant amount of people who were more skilled than Chegar. People with brilliant hacking skills sprung up every year. And Chegar chose the path to survive without sticking with those people – the path of a spy, designated to jump around the world and eliminate any individuals who stood in the way of the organization he belonged to.

Except Chegar did not dirty his own hands. He hired other capable people in the area he settled in and put them to work in his place so he would not leave any traces behind; anyone who he could easily cut ties with at a moment's notice. In this country, those were Siva and Irasawa. Once this job was finished, he would eliminate them and find his next pawns.

Chegar got onto the subway at Hakata Station and headed to Siva's place. The store he ran was at the corner of the shopping district in Nishijin between the laundry service storefront and the stationary shop. At the front of the shop there was the sign that read 'PC Doctor's Studio,' and 'We Do Computer Maintenance, Data Recovery, and Virus Removal' were written on the wall. It was a small and old shop.

When Chegar peeked inside, there was an old man. He seemed to be a customer.

"If you exchange the keyboard for a new one, I will have it fixed right away. I will have it read in two to three days." A young man wearing a blue apron with the store name on it was interacting with the customer. He was a thin and gentle-mannered, and he looked suitable to work in the service industry. "If you have any issues, do not hesitate to give me a call."

The elderly man gave his thanks and walked out. Chegar stepped into the store in the other man's place. "You seem busy."

"Ah, Chegar-san. Good afternoon." Siva gave him a smile and greeted him. "Irasawa-san is already here."

"Is that so?"

They always met at this shop to discuss work.

"I'll close the store, so please wait inside."

Chegar headed behind the counter as instructed and proceeded into the next room. It was a ten-tatami mat size room and served as Siva's work space. There were five computers set up on a long table and ten display screens on the wall. A man wearing a jersey was sitting on a sofa in the corner of the room. He had a large-build and blond hair that reached to his shoulders. He was Irasawa.

Irasawa made no move to look over at Chegar and kept his focus on his smartphone. Occasionally he would smirk. It was creepy.

"Irasawa," Chegar addressed him. "What are you looking at?"

Irasawa finally looked over to him. His eyes were vacant and he had hollow cheeks. His complexion was poor too. His features reminded Chegar of a drug addict, but what he indulged himself with was not drugs but murder.

"The previous *match*. Here," Irasawa tossed him the device. Chegar caught it with one hand and looked at the small screen. The video was on replay. A slightly dirtied man was in a unique ring covered by a wire netting. He must have been homeless. The one filming was Irasawa. It looked like he was slicing up the man while holding the camera in his left hand, and the footage was zoomed up close to his victim's expression as he yelled in pain. Blood spurted forth from his body and got onto the camera lens.

"I've had enough." Chegar tossed back the cellular device with a sigh. "I don't want to see it."

Irasawa was a boxer in the past. However, his mental psyche broke down the moment he killed his opponent in a match. He was unable to forget the sensation of when he took a person's life, and he disappeared from the public stage. He continued making small coin for a living by hurting others in underground boxing for a while, but he ended up being unsatisfied with that and desired to become a murderer. Even now he kept abducting homeless people and forced them to partake in a one sided match. He even made a ring in his garage for the occasions.

"You were the one who said to take a video of it, remember?"

"I didn't say you could watch it twenty-four-seven."

This man was sick. He could not be cured from his crime addiction. Irasawa

would periodically feel restless until he killed someone. But as time passed, he developed a thirst for killing people.

Although his victims were homeless, if he killed too many of them too frequently, someone would end up finding out and capturing him. So Chegar ordered him to 'take a video of when you're killing them, so you can watch that and distract yourself when you get the urge to kill.' It had some effect on him, and since Irasawa started making the videos his killing sprees had lessened.

Just as the executive from the organization had said, Irasawa was crazy. But he did not just have vices. Murder was a hobby for him. If Chegar gave him the request to kill someone, he would do it for free. Chegar had to pay a heavy amount of money for a skilled hacker like Siva, so it was difficult to maintain a budget. Having Irasawa handle the body disposal after killing them for free was a huge convenience for Chegar. Although Irasawa had a couple of issues, Chegar could not be unsatisfied with him. He was able to turn a blind eye to his behavior.

"Do I finally get to kill someone?" Irasawa looked up at Chegar and smirked. Chegar came all the way to this shop only when he wanted to task the two killers with a job.

"Don't you always do?"

"Homeless aren't people." Irasawa laughed. "They're just trash."

"Listen, Irasawa." Chegar stated with a stern voice. "This is work. It's different from the games you usually do."

"I get it."

I wonder about that. Chegar shrugged. He then glanced over to one of Siva's computers. It was still on. Chegar peeked at the screen. On it was an image of a young man.

Just about then Siva had just finished closing the shop and entered the room. "Sorry to make you wait."

Chegar pointed to the screen and asked. "Who is this man?"

"Don't know." Siva smiled and cocked his head to the side. "Just some NEET."

He sat down in his chair and continued.

“I tampered with this guy’s life, but I messed up. I think looking back on it, I was too hung up on the nude middle school girls.”

Nude middle school girls? I have no idea what he’s talking about, but he must have been causing mischief again.

“I was going with the scenario that he quit working for a company while looking for another job, but job searching didn’t go well and despaired and blamed everything on the company, making him result to writing death threats.”

This man named Siva may have a worse personality than Irasawa. There was probably no other person as two-faced as he was. Although he appeared to always have a gentle smile and seemed honest and kind, his true self was twisted. No one could see his true nature under the mask he donned. While he worked at the computer repair shop, behind the scenes this man took pleasure in taking action to destroy others’ lives.

“Was the congressman Yamanaka forfeiting his position earlier also because of you?” Chegar recalled the report which included the article of a certain congressman withdrawing himself from the re-election the other day.

“It was a job I got from the opposing candidate.” Siva explained with pride. “I exposed his corruption and acts of adultery. It didn’t even matter if it was real or not. As soon as they became rumors, his life was over.”

This man Siva – codename s_i_v_a – was a hacker as well as a hitman. However, his method of killing was unique and nothing similar to standard hitman’s. He specialized in eliminating people socially, making him receive the name the Cracker in the underground. He would fabricate crimes or scandals and make people in society believe in them. He even had pressured people into committing suicide before. Siva had influential people and celebrities among his regular customers – from politicians who want to eliminate their opposing candidates and company executives who want competing companies to go bankrupt, to actresses who want to knock down their rivals by a peg.

“But I’m tired of having these big shots and celebs as my targets. They’re doing shady things behind the scenes without me making them up anyway.”

Chegar glanced at the man displayed on the screen. “And that’s why you are trying to mess an ordinary good person’s life?”

“That’s exactly it.” Siva nodded with a smile on his face. “Like making an earnest salaryman out to be a sex offender or a police officer with a strong sense of justice a drug addict. Isn’t it marvelous how it’s possible to make someone’s life anything you want it to be? I made a company employee quit his job just previously. That was a lot of fun.”

“Seems like you’re acting like a god would.”

“You must be envious of it, right?”

Chegar tutted in his mind. He was slightly unnerved that this man would use his abilities to play god. If he would use them on meaningless shenanigans, then it’d be great if I could have those talents. They could be found useful in helping the country or justice instead.

“Enough with your games for now. I have a job for you.”

Siva’s eyes shone at Chegar’s words. “Who do we get to kill this time?”

“Macro-hard.”

“Macro-hard?” Siva burst out a laugh. “That’s a stupid name.”

“He seems to have obtained information on our organization. Find his location.”

“Alright.” Siva moved his long arms over the keyboard and began typing.

Translation Notes:

1. The organization .mmm is pronounced as “m three.”
2. Tenjin refers to the downtown area in Fukuoka in the central ward. Nakasu is a famous redlight district in Fukuoka.
3. Momotarou (桃太郎) is a famous Japanese folktale.
4. The SoftBank Hawks team was formerly known as the Nankai Hawks until the late 1980s.
5. Nishijin (西新) is a shopping district in the Sonohara Ward, west of Ohori park and south of Fukuoka Yafuoku! Dome.

6. This novel was the first where the main antagonists in the illustrations were not provided with their names in roman characters. Siva's ended up being given away in this chapter, but I don't know the origin of Chegar's name, so I may be wrong. I was torn between Chegar and Chegal but leaned more towards Chegar. When the [article](#) came out about the new antagonists for the anime when it was airing, his name was also spelled as Chegar in that, but then the subbers ended up doing Chegaru, the Japanese pronunciation of the name. I disagree with this, so I'm also doing Chegar. It makes sense in my head.

Credit and much thanks to Voissane for helping me edit this series as always.

Second Inning

Top of the Second Inning

“This is a vulgar video.....”

Vulgar was putting it lightly. Being shown the brutal footage, Martinez openly grimaced. He replayed the video once again to make sure. It was a video uploaded on a video hosting website. One man appeared in the video. Naturally his face was not shown. The location must have been in the man’s house. He was in a narrow bathroom, so this had to be at an apartment somewhere. In the room was a small and dirty dog. It was probably a stray. The man stuffed the dog into a black bag and fastened it.

The next moment the man kicked the bag.

The dog yelped. The man continuously kicked the bag. Each time the dog would howl in pain. The man then took out a knife and stabbed the bag. He relentlessly cut up the bag over and over again. There was a high pitched shriek, which sounded more anguished than usual, and the dog lashed about inside the bag. Blood seeped through the bag and poured onto the bathroom tiles endlessly.

The dog was thrashing and withering inside the bag. But then its movements started to slow. And then the whining stopped at last. It had stopped moving, taking its last breath. The footage focused on the black bag. From the torn up openings in the bag, Martinez could see the dog’s bloodstained fur. And the video ended there.

It was a footage that would make anyone want to turn away. Even for a torturer like Martinez, the brutality unsettled him. Jiro was apparently busy making a costume, so Martinez ended up helping him with his avenger work since he was free. But he ended up being tasked with a heavy case.

The client was a middle aged woman associated with the animal welfare group.

“Isn’t it awful?” The woman searched for an approval from him with a

grievous expression. “There are many more of them like that. All were treated the exact same way.”

There were three other videos uploaded like this. All of them were uploaded under the same account and were identical in footage. That meant there were at least four dogs that had become victims to this brutality. And they must have committed other crimes as well. “Just how many has he killed, dammit.”

“It’s horrible.....These puppies haven’t done anything wrong!”

Moved to tears, the woman took out a handkerchief and wiped the corners of her eyes.

“They’ve done something horrific.” Martinez gave a low groan. He decided to overlook the fact that he had done more cruel acts than the culprit in this video. “I’ll make them pay.”

The woman tightened her hold on the handkerchief and stated firmly. “I want you to punish the person who took this video.”

Martinez had to find the person behind the brutal video and exact revenge on the individual. So he had to put the person into a bag, kick them around and cut them up. He had to put the culprit through the same pain they did to the dogs. That was his client’s request.

So the first course of action he had to take was to confirm the individual who uploaded the video.

“Ah, hello? It’s me.” After the meet up with his client, Martinez had made a call. This man would definitely be able to find the culprit. After all, he was the best helper with connections to the internet Martinez had. “Enokida, I have something I need you to look into. Can you meet with me today?”



“Ta-da! It’s done!”

Jiro held out the costume he made in front of Misaki just as she got back home from school: a mushroom-shaped wig he had trimmed himself and a dress he re-made by adding frills to a one piece dress for a child. It was a work he had pride in. He was ecstatic to be able to make a costume for his child that could transform her into a beautiful princess in just one day.

“What do you think? Here, I got you a wig too. For a princess, I thought it just had to be blonde.”

But unlike the elevated Jiro, Misaki was not smiling for some reason. Jiro had thought she would be more happy about it, though.

“Wh-what’s wrong, Misa-chan.....?”

Did she not like it? Getting nervous, when he asked that fearfully Misaki said in a small voice. “.....The play ‘the Bamboo Kingdom and the Mushroom Kingdom’ got suspended.”

“Eh?”

Suspended?

“Riria-chan’s mom was apparently really mad. Saying, ‘why wasn’t my daughter the heroine?!’”

“Oh dear.”

So she was one of those rumored monster parents. He understood the feeling of thinking your own child was the best, but a parent should not butt in here. Jiro was shocked to hear this.

“The teacher made all the girls in class the heroine as princesses so no one would be unsatisfied.”

Misaki explained the whole story with an annoyed look.

“The script got revised too. Takehiko became a flirtatious prince and had relations with all the princesses, and the princesses fought over Takehiko.”

“That’s rather explicit.” Jiro frowned. “What on earth is this now? An afternoon drama?”

“But the principal shut it down in the end, and we had to drop it.”

“Oh I don’t doubt it.”

“So we’re doing a recital instead.”

And that’s why I don’t need the costume anymore, Misaki cast her eyes downward.

“Is that the case? That’s unfortunate.”

“.....I’m sorry. Even though you went through all the trouble to make this for me.” Misaki muttered quietly and hung her head. “I’m sorry, Jiro-chan.”

Oh shoot, Jiro grimaced. Because he got so carried away when he heard she would be the heroine, he ended up making her feel guilty for this.

Due to her upbringing, she had a non-child-like aspect to her. She was modest and always had an adult-like expression. Jiro thought it would be great if she lightened up a bit more though. “It’s fine. Don’t worry about it.”

“But, you put time and effort into making that.....”

“Misaki, you know,” Jiro placed a hand on her tiny shoulder and looked closely at her face. He then admonished to her slowly while keeping his focus on her. “Parent’s can’t help but be excited to do something for their kid’s sake.”

Although he said that, a child probably would not understand.

“It’s a shame I won’t see you as the heroine.” Jiro then winked. “But I’ll be there for the recital. So you better sing.”

“.....Okay.”

She finally seemed to feel better. Jiro grinned at her when she gave him a bashful smile.



It was nine at night when Lin left the Banba Detective Office. Lin got onto the bus heading from Hakata to Tenjin, and from there he walked to his destination, the Saeki Cosmetic Clinic. It was far past the time for medical examinations, and only the director was left inside.

“Please, come in.”

Saeki invited Lin to come inside and showed him to the examination room. Lin was pressed to go in and take a seat. Sitting across from a man in white clothing like this made him feel like he was the one to be examined, but he did not come here because he was unhappy with his looks. Today he came here for work. The name of the client he received from Genzo the day before was Saeki.

“I never expected you of all people to have a job for us.”

Saeki gave a small smile at Lin's comment. "It's a small favor I'm asking for though. I just want you to look into something."

Saeki took out a file as he said that and handed it to Lin. Taking it, Lin opened it up to find several photos inside. They were all photographs of corpses lying down.

Saeki explained the details of the case. "I've been having these inexplicable bodies brought to me as of late. Five in just this past half year. It looks like these were all done by the same person, since the method was the same."

"Uh-huh."

"Through a collector I'm somewhat acquainted with, they were referred to me and had sent over the bodies for me to take care of.However, the culprit behind these murders doesn't seem to be an acquaintance of any of my clients." Saeki said, suspicious. "They either heard of me from somewhere or they are sending the bodies anonymously. They even threatened a courier, telling them, 'if you don't dispose of them, I'll kill you.'"

"That's unsettling."

In this industry, irregular customers had a high possibility of causing trouble. There was room for concern.

"So you want me to find the culprit and kill them, right?" Lin asked.

"Precisely." Saeki nodded. "I have a bad feeling about this person.....There's something almost bizarre on how the bodies were handled."

Saeki's job was primarily to dispose of bodies and resell them. For him to have seen as many of corpses as he did up until this point and still say that was significant.

"All the victims were homeless. They didn't seem to have taken a bath in days. They had no personal items on them; maybe just some loose change. I did autopsies as I usually do, but I only found that the cause of death were all from hemorrhagic shock."

Lin turned his focus onto the photos again. He could definitely see cuts made on men all over their bodies. The markings looked like someone held a knife in

either hand, got on top of them and struck them from above. “They were hacked to pieces.”

“All of them were punched around too before they died. All the bruises were on the face and upper body.”

“A torturer then?”

“I don’t believe so. There are no traces of bondage on the bodies.”

Lin made another question. “Then these men were all free to move and were repeatedly beaten up to a pulp for a long period of time?”

“Yes.”

Then when the men could no longer move, they were repeatedly stabbed with a sharp weapon. The victims’ faces were closely shown in the photos. Lin saw their mouths and scowled. “They’re missing their front teeth.”

All the bodies in the photos had their mouths wide open. And yet, Lin could not see their teeth.

“They seemed to have been pulled after death. Not even professionally. They were probably removed forcefully with pliers.”

“Why would they do that.....?”

It was incomprehensible. To prevent anyone from identifying the bodies, they should have removed all their teeth. Besides, for them to have requested for a specialist to dispose of the bodies, there was no need to hide his work. And since all of the victims were homeless, even if they were identified it would not be significant.

So the culprit’s objective was something different.

“Got another weird ass job again.” Lin groaned.

He would have to find a common thread among the victims to see if he could track down the culprit.

“First, we got to find out who these guys are.”

Although they were homeless, there was no way they had this vagrant lifestyle since they were born. Some may have had their records around still,

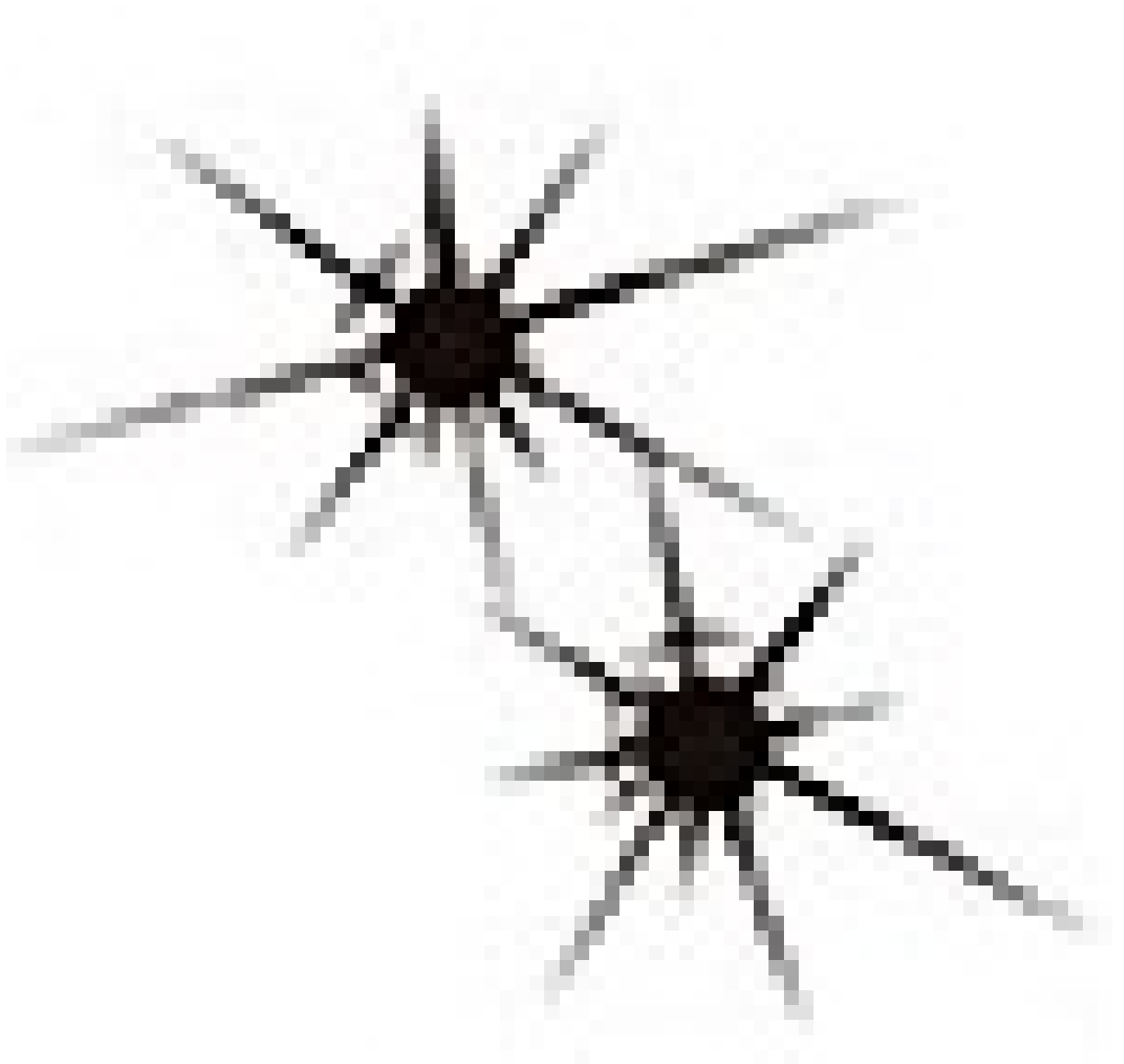
such as acquiring some kind of qualification like a criminal offense. *Guess I could have that mushroom compare the corpses' faces to their registered photos.* Just as Lin considered that, he realized it was impossible.

“Trying to match them up probably wouldn’t work since these guys are so beaten up.”

All of their faces were so swelled up, they could not be distinguished on a computer. This seemed like it would be a troublesome job.

“.....I took the wrong one.”

He recalled the drawing he made yesterday. *I wish I would’ve taken the other one.* Lin shrugged his shoulders while feeling regret seep in.



The job Banba took was from a man who ran an Italian restaurant and an

acquaintance of Genzo's. He apparently used to be an underling for the yakuza, but he had left that life behind him a few years ago and started a modest job since then.

The chic restaurant stood desolately on a corner in Daimyou. When Banba visited the place after work hours, the owner of the restaurant greeted him with an exhausted smile. He brought Banba inside and began the discussion.

"Please take a look at this." The owner spread out a piece of paper onto the table. It was a sheet printed off of an internet page. According to him, a malicious customer set his eyes on his restaurant about a half year ago and started posting more than a hundred slandering comments about it on the internet. They even wrote vituperate reviews: 'All of it was bad. It was scraps for a pig.' 'There were cockroaches. Unsanitary. It smelled like a waste dump.' 'The shop attendees' attitudes were awful. They were shit.' There were an abnormal amount of bad reviews. Banba had a feeling they had a grudge against the place.

When Banba asked the owner that, the man cocked his head. "I'm not sure about why he would do this.....I only know the culprit. He's someone named Yusuke Aoyagi, an employee for a company."

It took him off guard for the man to already know the culprit. The owner explained the details when Banba gave a slightly shocked expression.

"His superior came to the restaurant. He told me, 'I'm sorry for the trouble our employee caused you. I would not like this to be made public.' Apparently the company found out those were written on a company computer."

"I see, so that was the case."

"They said they gave a strict warning to the person who did it.....And yet he's still going at it." The owner scowled. His pleasant and friendly demeanor had changed to the cold and harsh glare suited for his former occupation. "I can't let him off."

It was obstruction of business. Because of the posts, there was a decrease in customers. At this rate it would be a matter of life or death. At least for his client, the restaurant was important to him like it was his own child. Perhaps it was due to the conviction made to use any means necessary to protect it or had

the will to bear a grudge against anyone who spoke ill of his restaurant, the owner stated in a firm voice. “Please kill the man behind those posts – Aoyagi.”

Regardless whether the professional baseball team he supported was in a slump at the moment, Banba could never withdraw from a job. After he put on his black suit and fastened his tie, Banba got into his beloved vehicle.

He headed to the employee Aoyagi’s home – except that he had already quit the company he worked for. Aoyagi’s room was on the first floor of an apartment building in Meinoama. Banba checked for any movement inside from the balcony before getting closer. The balcony window was unlatched. Peering through the eye holes in his Niwaka mask, Banba was speechless.

“Ah-”

What he saw was the body of a man suspended from the ceiling. Something similar to a rope was wrapped around his neck. The body wavered left to right slowly, pushed by the wind.

Banba leapt over the fence of the balcony and infiltrated inside from the window. He checked through the person’s belongings to confirm his identity. He compared the body’s face to the one in the driver’s license he took out from his wallet. It definitely looked like the corpse was indeed Aoyagi.

“.....What an unexpected development.”

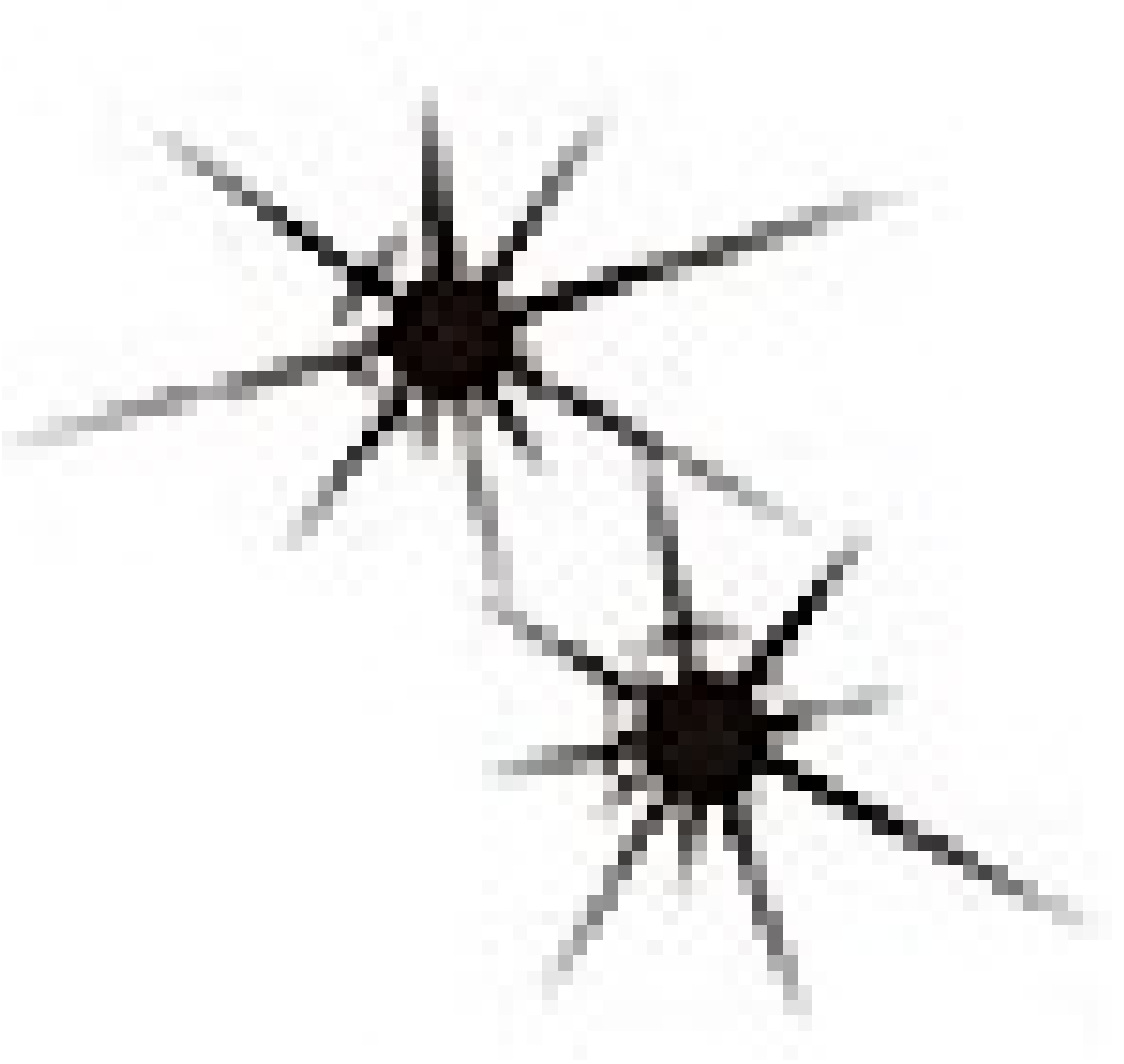
Banba whispered to himself unconsciously. He did not expect the man he was supposed to kill to already be dead. And he ended his own life. Banba looked around the room, but there was no indication he was attacked by someone. It was clean. In fact, it was almost too clean. He looked around closely again and spotted a piece of paper left on the table. It was a will. What was written on it was ‘I didn’t do it. I was set up.’ After that, the note continued at length proclaiming his innocence.

I didn’t do it – he must have been referring to slandering the restaurant. If what he said was true, then someone else was behind the posts. *Who could have set Aoyagi up?*

Banba felt like he was putting a foot into pitch blackness. This seemed like it would be a troublesome job.

“Guess last wasn’t the least.”

Banba muttered to himself and headed back to his car.



Martinez met with Enokida at a cafe in the Gates Building. They sat across each other, and after Martinez explained the details of his case, Enokida began typing away on his laptop. After a few moments –

“I found out who the guy is.”

Enokida then turned the screen towards him. Information on the man was displayed on the screen. Martinez managed to confirm the identity of the person who uploaded the video due to the skilled hacker. The person responsible was someone named Taniyama – a young part-time worker residing in Fukuoka. Enokida was easily able to look into everything about the man from

his name and birth date to his address as well.

“This is him, huh.....” Martinez muttered as he looked closely at the man’s face in the photo.

The man was pale and looked weak-willed. He did not look like someone who would do atrocious acts like killing dogs, but then again it was not like he knew any mature person that would do that too.

“Still, he’s really doing something shitty.” Recalling the contents of the video, Martinez spat out in disgust.

“These sort of cases have been happening a lot more recently. Guys film these criminal acts and put them up on the internet.” Enokida also nodded in agreement. “Since there are sites which give them ad money depending on view count, they can easily earn money this way without having to work.”

“These guys are idiots. I wouldn’t want to do something that stands out just for money.”

The man who shoplifted the month before and uploaded the video of driving without a license the previous week was then immediately arrested. Stupidity did not end.

Enokida smirked. “Well, make sure you give them a good punishment.”

“Sorry I always depend on you, Enokida. You have my thanks.” Martinez patted his shoulders with his large palms multiple times. “How much should I pay you this time?”

“I don’t need anything.” Enokida replied, waving his hand in dismissal. “You can just treat me for a meal next time.”

“Got it.”

Just as he said that, however, Martinez remembered; he had one more thing for this man.

“That’s right, here.” He told him and handed him out a paper bag. “A present for you. I got it from Jiro.”

When Martinez visited Jiro’s place for an avenger job yesterday, he was told to ‘give it to Enokida-chan.’

“Eh? From Jiro-san? What is it?”

Enokida peeked into the bag and took out what was inside. It was a wig. It was a plain blond, mushroom-shaped hair. It was the exact same shape as Enokida’s hair.

“It would help to have a spare, right?”

“.....My hair isn’t a hat.”

Enokida pouted.

“Besides, why would Jiro-san have something like this?”

“He planned to use it for a play. A play Misaki’s class was going to do.”

“A play?”

“A tragic love story between the Mushroom Princess and the Bamboo Prince.”

“What on earth is that? That sounds like crap.”

In the end, the play got cancelled, and they no longer needed the wig. But instead of throwing it away, Jiro decided to give it to Enokida. Jiro had said, “you could wear this when you can’t get rid of your bedhead.”

“I was just given hand-me-downs instead of a present.”

That was exactly it. Martinez simply smiled deceptively, unable to deny it bluntly.

“.....A play, huh.”

Enokida suddenly muttered as he closely looked at the wig.

“That’s great. I wanted to try that too.” He reclined back into his chair and shrugged. “I wanted to have a normal school life.”

“Your household wasn’t normal though.”

Martinez had heard about the discord between Enokida and his real family directly from Enokida himself. Except it was not Enokida who had opened up to him – it was Martinez who had forced him to talk about it.

Some sort of occurrence could happen for an informant and a torturer who makes someone give information to cross paths due to the dangerous nature of

their occupations. Martinez first met Enokida seven years ago. Enokida was captured by a certain organization that Martinez belonged to at the time. He ordered to torture Enokida and make him give information on their enemy. But since it did not sit well with Martinez to torture a teenager, he decided to make Enokida talk by giving him a powerful truth serum, but it did not succeed. What Enokida talked about was not information on their enemy, but complaints about his parents and family. Martinez had only been told, 'I was strictly raised by his parents to become their successor,' and 'I never got to play with other students my age and was under constant supervision at all times of the day under my caretaker.' And then 'my only time for relaxation was having piano lessons once a week' All were comments of simple unhelpful resentment.

Even as he was in a lethargic state, Enokida had kept his lips sealed on the important information in his head. What he did was a countermeasure to the drug in his system. He was able to protect his client's information by talking about his own secrets. Martinez thought that was incredible mental fortitude. Even though his limbs were bound, he did not seem to care. Martinez was blown away for how unusual of a kid he was.

"You've been fearless even back then. Normally a person would just cry when they're going to be killed. You were just a minor."

"My life was full of vicissitudes. Even when I was young."

Such old memories. It had already been seven years since then, but Enokida still seemed to resent his family.

"You don't keep contact with your family?"

"I can't." Enokida snorted. "I was disowned."

"What was the cause of it?" Martinez questioned. From the conversations they had, he had the general picture.

Enokida spoke slowly. "When I said I wanted to become a programmer back in middle school, I got hit by that man."

That man – he meant his father.

"Just how much money do you think we've spent on you, my stupid son! That's what he said to me. So I got back at him. I made my own virus and

infected that man's personal computer with it."

"That's a cute prank. So childish."

"Right?" Although Martinez intended to be ironic, Enokida had smirked in response.

"It was the first virus I made. It's the one that lets me display characters I choose to appear on a person's computer."

"It's the virus you use often for Valentine's, right?"

"Yes, that one."

Enokida had an annual custom prank for Valentine's Day. After he would find guys who would be popular with the ladies, he would hack their computer and have the sentence 'so you didn't receive chocolate this year too, huh,' on their screen. Enokida had meant to do a simple tease like that to his father, but the man did not take it well at all. He had only gotten even more angry than his usual grumpy mood.

"I got pissed after being told I was a 'stupid son,' so I said 'you're the idiot' back. I got yelled at a lot after that."

That certainly seemed like this man would tell the other person that over a computer screen than in person.

"And that was when I got into hacking."

"You mean you didn't want to stop."

"It may be an illness," Enokida smirked. "I heard that man say that before too. 'He's an illness. Nothing could cure him.'"

Bottom of the Second Inning

They found their target unexpectedly easy. Everyone was essentially bare in front of Siva's tracking skills. The hacker named macro-hard was apparently a man by the name Kuroiwa who lived in Yakuin.

It was work time. Chegar and his team changed into uniforms – they were regular blue work clothes movers would wear. They got into a truck and headed to macro-hard's home. The three infiltrated the apartment building from the

entrance, feigning to be movers. They stood outside of their target's room and rang the intercom. Perhaps he was out; they pressed the button once more, but there was no response.

On the third attempt, the door finally opened.

".....What's your deal?"

The man showed his face through the crack in the door. He had an annoyed expression. There was no mistake this was macro-hard – or more accurately, Kuroiwa. The chain to the door was still latched.

"We're from the Oak Moving Center."

Chegar gave a friendly reply to the man who was glaring at them suspiciously.

"We are helping with moving someone in next door to you, and we are making our greetings. We were worried we would be making noise and disturb you." He told him and held out a box of cakes. "This is our way of apologizing."

"Ah.....well thank you." The other replied back nonchalantly. However, his weariness had lessened.

The door shut again, and Chegar heard the sound of the chain unlatching. Irasawa estimated the timing of when the door would open again and stuck his arm in when it did. He used his monstrous strength to force the door wide open. The Chegar and Siva followed inside right behind him.

"Wha-" The man was backing up, wide-eyed. "Who the hell are you-"

Irasawa grabbed their prey that was trying to flee by the nape of his neck and covered his mouth with a cloth, putting the man to sleep by having him inhale the fumes. Kuroiwa's body collapsed onto the ground. Irasawa took out a bag and put the man in it head first. It was a huge bag to completely fit a person in. After he got him in all the way to his feet, Irasawa fastened the opening and carried it over his shoulder.

"I don't want to stay too long. Let's hurry." Chegar ordered in a small voice.

He received the order to erase all the information macro-hard had by the people above him. They dug through all the draws and searched every shelf to find any electronic device. This man owned two desktop computers and a

laptop. They had to bring all those back with them and destroy them.

They managed to carry out macro-hard and his three computers out of the room in one go and stuffed them all into the truck. Since they looked like regular movers carrying objects out of the room, the residents did not bear any sense of suspicion. Inside the apartment building they were told by an old man with a smile, “thank you for your hard work.” This was such a carefree country, with no weariness whatsoever.

They finished their work and got into the vehicle. They first dropped by Irasawa’s house. It was a one story house in Yoshizuka. When they arrived, Irasawa carried the sleeping macro-hard on his shoulder and disappeared into the garage. There was the set-up ring inside it. Irasawa would have a match with him until he felt satisfied.

“We take him in alive only for him to be tormented and killed.” Siva smiled as they watched Irasawa go in. “Irasawa-san has terrible tastes as always.”

“You don’t fall short from him either.” To Chegar, both of these men had terrible tastes.

“No way. I’m definitely not worse than Irasawa-san.”

“You think?”

Chegar shrugged before starting the car again. With only the computers left in the truck, they now headed to Siva’s place.

Translation Notes:

Sanpaku Eyes (三白眼) is a term to refer to eyes with visible white between the iris and the lower eyelid.

Third Inning

Top of the Third Inning

Since the target he was tasked to kill was already dead, there was nothing more a killer like him could do. He should report this to his client and mediator and look for another job to do, but this case tugged at Banba's mind. 'I didn't do it.' 'I don't know anything.' His mind kept thinking back to that bitter note that the person who committed suicide pleaded in. If his testimony was correct, then the true culprit was someone else. The person Banba should kill was a different person.

Unable to get a break in on the situation under normal circumstances, Banba decided to ask a detective he knew for information. He called out to Shigematsu at a restaurant near Haruyoshi Bridge and drank together. After their meals were brought out to them, Shigematsu began to discuss the main topic at hand. "About the case you asked about, it's without a doubt that Yusuke Aoyagi had killed himself."

".....Really?"

"Yeah. There were traces that he did it himself. And his suicide note was indeed written by him."

Banba had wondered if there was something behind this case; that perhaps it was not suicide and Aoyagi was cut in some kind of situation. Banba had those suspicions, but both were shot down.

"And what about the business obstruction posts?"

"What we understand from his colleagues is that Aoyagi became a problem to the company he worked for. The log of his posts he wrote up during work was on the company computer and that his superior called him up about it numerous times."

"But the person himself said he didn't do it?"

"Yeah. That was the one point they brought up: that he didn't remember doing it. He went on saying he didn't recall anything related to those posts and

that there must have been some sort of mistake.”

In the end, Aoyagi had quit the company before he could get fired.

“Apparently rumors started spreading around inside the company, and he started to become ashamed. His colleagues were singling him out for using the company computer as a distraction during work hours. So of course he ended up wanting to quit.” Shigematsu then added. “But according to the anti-cyber crime division, it was true that the posts were made on Aoyagi’s home computer as well as the computer at work.”

Shigematsu gulped down the remainder of his beer in one go and told him. “This case doesn’t seem right somehow.”

Banba had reached for his beer mug but abruptly stopped. Posts on the internet made that the person was innocent for – he had heard something like that recently.

That’s right. Saitou, he recalled. A similar thing had happened to Saitou just this past day.

“What if this person was truly innocent.”

“.....What was that?”

“Someone had framed Aoyagi.” Banba said in a low voice. “Someone who used a remote operating virus.”



“Ah, hello? Mushroom?”

The day after Lin had met up with Saeki, he called Enokida. He sent him the data of the fingerprints taken from the bodies of the homeless, thinking he could ask Enokida to compare them. If there were any matches among them, then they could determine their identities; Lin could get a lead on this case.

“I have something I need you to look into. Can I tell you about it now?”

‘Yeah, that’s fine.’ Enokida replied cheerfully as ever. ‘Where are you right now?’

“At the office.”

‘I’ll head over there. I’m at Hakata Station at the moment anyway.’

“Sorry.”

He then dropped the call.

A few minutes later the door to the office opened. It should have taken more than five minutes to get here from Hakata Station even if he had hurried over. It was too soon for it to be Enokida. When Lin looked towards the entrance, he saw the exhausted looking Banba standing there.

“I’m home.”

Banba was in a suit. He had just gotten back from work. He must have been drinking as his clothes smelled like alcohol.

“Ah, welcome back.” Lin then asked. “How did your job go?”

“It’s an odd case.” Banba loosened his tie, shrugging. “When I went to kill him, the fella had already killed himself.”

“Isn’t that great for you? You didn’t have to waste time killing someone.”

“There was a note. It said, ‘I didn’t do it.’ There’s gotta be somethin’ behind this case.” After Banba had changed into normal clothes, he then asked Lin. “How about your end?”

“I got a series of murders of the homeless.” Lin explained in full. “And the bodies that got beaten to a pulp were sent to Saeki’s place. All of them had their teeth pulled too.”

“If they was sent to the doc’s place, then the culprit has got to be a killer, right?”

“There is that possibility.” Since the person knew the underground route of discarding the bodies, it would make sense that it would be someone from the same business as them. “Maybe it could be someone who wants to have a world with no homeless people and hired a professional to kill them all.”

But there was one thing left unsolved: the front teeth.

“.....Yet why would they pull out their teeth?”

“Ain’t that just spoils?”

Lin frowned at Banba’s words. “.....Spoils?”

“They want proof of killing their victims. So they dispose of the bodies but

keep somethin' off of their person, like pullin' out their teeth."

Spoils, huh, Lin groaned. He had heard about cases of serial killers stealing a possession of the person they kill or cut off a piece of hair for them to keep numerous times. So they were of that kind of people.

"If that is true, then they've got to be pretty dangerous."

Hitmen were dangerous to begin with, but a killer who want to sell off the bodies and want a part of them beside them had a massive difference in impression. The former would have the rational and professional qualities of a hitman, but the later indicated a hedonic and almost crazed outlook.

It was then. They heard quiet knocking on the door. Someone had come.

"Come in," Banba addressed the person outside the door.

Lin had thought it would be Enokida this time, but it was not.

"Pardon the intrusion."

The doors opened to reveal a man wearing black clothes. He was tall and slim; seemingly around sixty years old and had a moustache. He was gentle-mannered and wore a refined outfit.

"Are you a client?"

"Yes."

The butler-like man with white hair faced Banba and Lin and bowed.

"Please, take a seat over here," Banba offered him a space on the reception's chair. He then turned to Lin and asked. "Lin-chan, get the tea, please."

Lin gave a side glance to their male client as he got up. "Alright."



There was no way Martinez could let an insolent who would kill animals half for entertainment and show off a video of it do as he pleased. Avengers had the creed to deliver the same pain the other had inflicted onto someone, but it would not matter too much if Martinez made the man hurt a bit more. Martinez, a helper to the avenger, headed over to the apartment the culprit lived at determinedly.

The person responsible – Shinji Taniyama – was in his room. When Martinez rang the intercom the man greeted him at the door honestly, without pretending to be out. The moment the door opened, Martinez forced his way in and locked the door from the inside.

“Wha-what’s your deal?” The man in front of him had yelled. “I’ll call the cops for breaking in!”

“Call them if you want. But you are the one who’ll be in a pinch if the cops come.”

Taniyama was bewildered at Martinez’s threat. “.....What?”

“Don’t play dumb. I have proof.” Martinez took out his cell phone and played the video on it, holding the device in front of the person’s face. “This torture video is your doing, right?”

The man recognized it and quickly shook his head.

“I-it’s a misunderstanding!”

“How is this a misunderstanding? Don’t kid with me. I already know it was you who uploaded this video onto the net.”

“It’s true that I uploaded that video.” Taniyama admitted but then gave an explanation for it. “But I didn’t kill them!”

“What?”

Martinez had infiltrated this man’s home with the intention to punish him for his crime, but now he just got a wake up call.

“.....What do you mean?”

Taniyama quickly made his confession when Martinez pressed him for answers. According to what this man had to say, the entire video was fake. The procedure went like this: after receiving a puppy from a shelter, he would first film himself putting it in the black bag. After that, he would let the dog out and switch it to an electronic toy dog instead. He would then film himself slashing the toy in the bag with a knife – or more accurately a fake retractable knife – as it moved around inside it. Additionally Taniyama would add specks of blood to make it look like the dog had died.

Afterwards, he would use a high efficient video editing software, which was also used by professional editors, to make the rest of the video. He would put the two videos he filmed separately together and mix in dog yelping sounds to finish the fake torture video.

Taniyama knelt on the floor and had explained everything to Martinez. “I just wanted to earn a high number of clicks.To do that, I needed to make a

grotesque video.”

“.....” Martinez was so stunned he was at a loss for words. He told him, exasperated, while running a hand over his head. “What the hell’s that?That’s pathetic.”

He completely fell for this farce. It irritated him.

“And what did you do with the orphan dogs from the shelter?”

“I let them go.”

Martinez gave him one punch. “Bu-hegh,” Taniyama flew back from the force behind the punch – which Martinez apparently put more strength than he thought behind – as he gave a pathetic cry. He smashed into the wall and collapsed onto the floor.

“Wha-what was that for?” Taniyama yelled at him with a hand to his cheek.

“You let them go?!”

“I just put them back into the shelter!”

“You’re kidding me. Go get them again. Take responsibility and look after them.”

“Eh? But my apartment doesn’t allow pets-”

“Like I care.”

Martinez grabbed the man by the head with his large hand and squeezed.

“If you don’t do as I say, I’ll cut you up with your retractable knife.”

Taniyama seemed to get the message. “I got it,” he nodded frivolously with a teary voice while shaking.



The elderly butler-like man who visited the detective office was named Yagi. Over the past few days he had been dropping by various detective companies around Fukuoka, requesting them to look into finding someone's whereabouts. It had to be someone he desperately wanted to find to go to such lengths.

"I would like for you to find this young man." Yagi told them, taking out an old photo and placing it on the reception table. Lin and Banba examined the photo. It was a picture of a child around middle school age.

"A young man....." Banba muttered. "He looks more like a young boy here."

"Indeed. This was taken eight years ago." Yagi made a wry smile. "He is now twenty-three, so his facial features may have changed somewhat."

Lin also made a comment. "Actually, who is this guy?"

“He is the son of the household I work for. Due to a certain incident, he had vanished eight years ago.”

Since he worked as a servant for a household, then this family must be wealthy. There would be a lot of money involved. Lin took another close look at the boy in the photo. And then he suddenly realized; he felt like he had seen that face somewhere before.

The boy had silky, black mushroom cut bob hair and long bangs that covered half of his face. From what he could see under his hair, the boy had impudent, sanpaku eyes as though he made light of people.

It dawned on Lin. *Could this guy be* – “Hey, Banba.”

“Hm?”

“Doesn’t this kid look like him?”

“Who do ya mean by him?”

“You know, that mushroom-”

Just as he was saying that, the office door opened.

“Hey,”

The one who appeared this time was the young man with mushroom hair – Enokida.

“I was a bit late. I got caught by the light.”

“Ah, Enokida-kun.” Banba raised his hand. “What are you doin’ here?”

“Lin called me, so I came here.” Enokida moved his gaze to the reception area. “If you’re busy at the moment, then I can-”

Enokida’s voice abruptly trailed off. He had stiffened with his mouth still open and his eyes wide.

The next moment –

“Young master!”

Yagi yelled.

“Young master!?” Lin and Banba exclaimed simultaneously.

What's the meaning of this? Young master? Do they know each other? Lin's eyes popped out of his head as he looked between Enokida and Yagi.

"Geh."

Enokida grimaced. And before they knew it, he immediately turned around and dashed off. They heard him stomp down the stairs swiftly.

"Please wait!"

By the time Yagi called out to him, Enokida had already ran out of their sights.

"Pardon me."

And then Yagi moved. He opened the office window and started to climb out of it.

"Eh?" Lin and Banba were shocked as they watched him. "You're kidding."

Yagi stepped onto the window pane.

"Hey, whatcha think you're doin'?!" Banba yelled.

"This is the third floor!" Lin also pitched in, but Yagi paid no heed to them and jumped out of the window.



Enokida rushed down the stairs at full speed and dashed out of the building complex the detective office was in.

“Young master!”

He heard someone call him. He turned around and looked up at the building.

“Geh.”

The elderly man was falling down. The man who was adorned in black clothes had jumped off from the third floor of the building and landed right in front of Enokida safely.

“It has been quite some time, young master.”

Enokida made another immediate attempt of running away, but he did not succeed. He was grabbed by the back of his neck, making him unable to move.

That man had ridiculous strength, compared to how he looked. *Actually, now thinking about it, he caught me like this often in the past*, Enokida recalled. He despised studying, and whenever he tried to sneak out of the house Yagi would always jump from the second floor and catch him. Even though he had gotten quite older, he was no difference from back then. Is this guy really human?

“.....Yagi,” Enokida made a sarcastic comment to the man grasping his arm to prevent him from escaping. “You got more white hair since I’ve last seen you.”

“It is great to see you are as cheeky as ever. If you have nothing nice to say, do not say anything at all.”

“Likewise, be a bit more modest.”

They then heard footsteps rushing down the stairs. They were from Lin and Banba. Both of them appeared to be shocked. That was to be expected, since the elderly man had leapt out of a window.

Yagi turned to face them and smiled. “Good gracious, I did not expect you two to be the young master’s friends.”

“Y-young master.....?”

Lin and Banba still had not caught up with the situation.

“Thank you for being friends with the young master.” Yagi added without concern. “This is a measure of my gratitude. Please accept it.”

What he took out from his pocket were bills.

“Stop it already.” Enokida demanded. Yagi had the habit of handing out bribes to his friends ever since he was in kindergarten.

“I don’t really get it,” Banba made a wry smile. “But I guess this worked out for you. You found the person you was lookin’ for.”

Lin’s eyes were still wide. “Mushroom.....You were a person’s kid?”

“What did you think I was?”

“Um, well..... a fungus.”

“I see.”

“I don’t have parents. I don’t know who gave birth to me.” Lin squared his

shoulders unnaturally while imitating Enokida's voice. "Shouldn't you say something like that?"

"That mimicry was spot on. Do it again."

"Well, they are my parents, so they are naturally smart individuals."

"That's so like him!"

"There is nothing I don't know. Aside from my parent's names."

"Yes! Exactly that!"

"How about not doing that with the actual person here?"

When Enokida glared at them, the two shut their mouths and looked away.

"So? What do you want with someone who was disowned?" Enokida looked back to Yagi. "If that man finds out, won't it put you in trouble?"

"Rest assured, the master had given me an extended time off and had told me to take my time and enjoy my trip."

Yagi then brought up why he was looking for him.

"The truth of the matter is I have something I wish to discuss with you."

Enokida decided they should part ways with Banba and Lin and change locations to talk. Yagi and him headed to the subway at Hakata Station and entered a cafe at the ticket gate. They ordered two iced coffees and sat down at a table, facing each other.

Enokida asked with a sullen look. "So, what did you have to discuss with me about?"

"Please take a look at this."

What Yagi took out from his bag was a photo and a laptop.

"This belongs to the master, but it has taken some damage due to hacking."

The photo was a screenshot taken off the computer. In the center text was displayed.

'Kazuo Matsuda.'

'I know your true face.'

‘If you do not wish for it to be known to the world, then send 10,000,000 yen as fast as possible.’

“For a threat, this message is pretty nice.” Enokida read the text once and said. “I wonder if that means this person has that much confidence.”

Apparently several minutes after this message was displayed started operating normally. Just as they considered it to be just a prank, the following day they received an e-mail from a free address which contained the contents of the threat.

“They demanded bitcoin as payment.”

“I expect they would.”

Using high cryptocurrency anonymously was a conventional method for cyber criminals.

“.....By chance, do you suspect me?”

“Not at all,” Yagi shook his head with a smile. “With as much skills as you have, I presume you would not use it to send threats for extortion, am I correct?”

That’s true, Enokida replied straightforwardly.

“My job is to protect that household. I must find whoever sent that threat and dispose of them.”

Yagi was a servant as well as a hitman for that family. That occupation did not seem to change for him over the past eight years.

However, their problems had nothing to do with Enokida now. Enokida waved his right hand dismissively. “Ah, is that so? Good luck with that.”

“I thought with your abilities you could find the culprit in question.”

“And why should I have to work for that man?”

“Perchance, you still resent him?” Yagi laughed teasingly. “You are surprisingly the type to hold a grudge.”

“.....Isn’t that natural?” Enokida pouted, resting his chin in his hand. “I was killed by my own father after all.”



“As expected of the elderly. All the grandpas and grandmas are all really lively in this country.” Lin said as he closed the window Yagi had jumped out of when they got back to the office. “I mean, he jumped off from the third floor.”

“That person’s just one of a kind.” Banba replied as he sat down on the sofa.

“But even that old man Genzo is like that.”

“He’s also one of a kind.”

Then aren’t they just one of a kind? Lin shrugged. He then recalled Enokida’s and Yagi’s exchange earlier and spoke with a frown. “Do you think those two are alright?”

“What for?”

“There was a strange air between them.”

They did not seem the least bit happy to reunite after eight years. Enokida made a clear look of disgust, and although Yagi had a kind smile etched on his face, his eyes were not smiling. Even an outsider like Lin could feel the perilous mood between them.

“There’s got to be a lot of intricate circumstances around them, right?”

“Well, I would assume so.” It was obvious that there were unique circumstances. After all, Enokida was from a household that had a servant employed there. “I never expected that mushroom to be a young master of some upstanding family.”

Lin was stunned earlier, but Banba was rather calm about it.

“Shouldn’t you be surprised hearing that? Aren’t you underreacting a bit?”

“It’s ‘cause I’ve seen some refined traits to him before,” Banba replied. “So I thought he had to have had a good upbringing’. He uses chopsticks really well.”

“Then by chance,” Lin suddenly had a thought. “Could that servant Yagi or whatever have come here to bring him back home?”

The heir ran away from home, so naturally Yagi should be searching for him to bring him back. He even went so far as to go to several detective agencies to do so.

Banba was doubtful though. “Hmm, after all this time? Eight years have passed.”

“Maybe it became a necessity now,” Lin suggested strongly going off only by speculation. “Like, maybe his father died or something.”

“Hmmm.....It’d be tough if Enokida-kun was no longer ‘round.” Banba frowned deeply. “He’s our important centerfielder.”

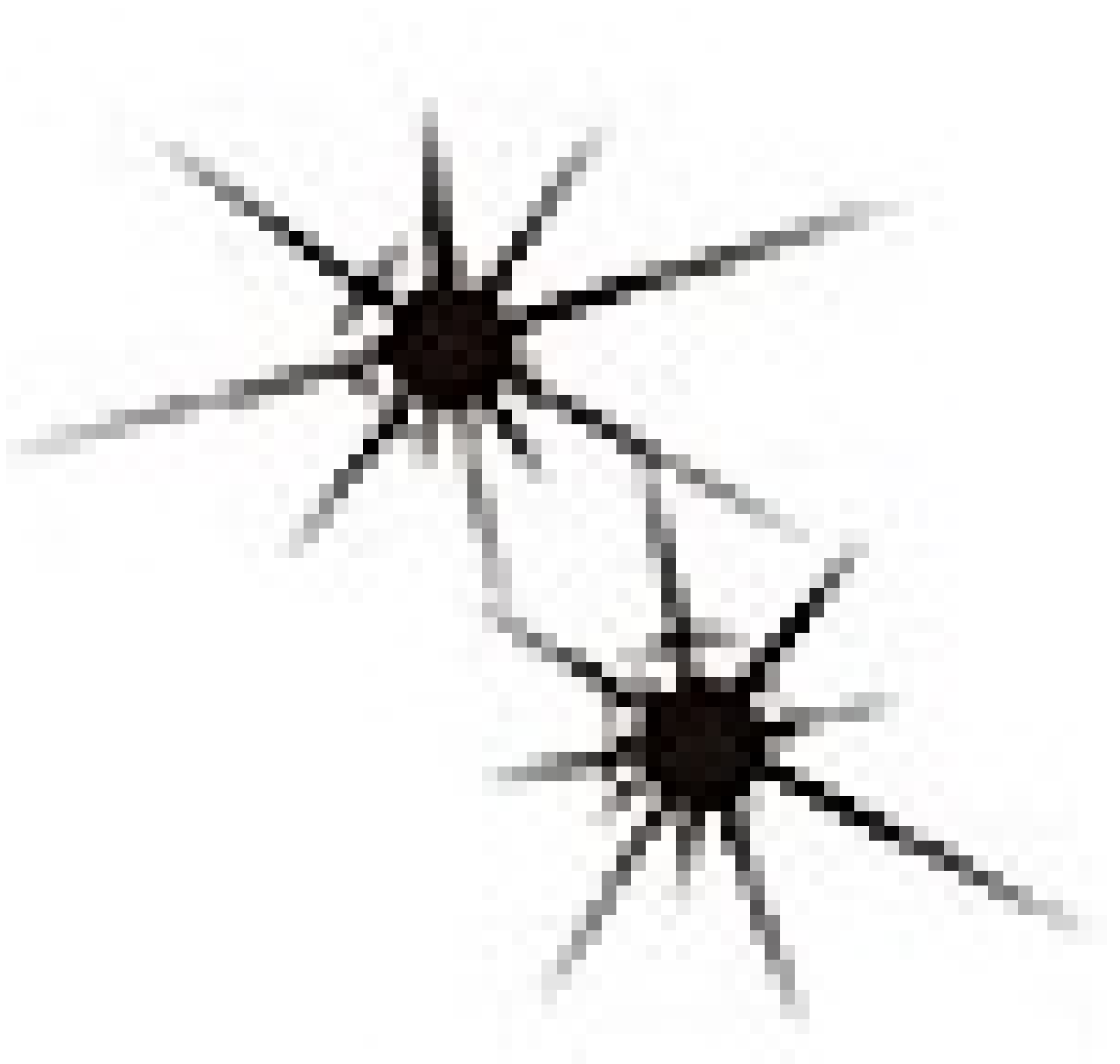
“.....Do you only ever think of baseball in that head of yours?” Lin sighed.

“I do,” Banba said defiantly. He then got up from the sofa and picked up his baseball bat case, hefting it over his shoulder.

“I’m headin’ to the battin’ cage. Then I’m gonna visit the old man’s place, so I may be late.”

After Lin saw him off, he also put his focus back on work: on the serial murders. Although he was provided with the fingerprints from the homeless victims, since Enokida was busy at the moment that job would have to wait.

Is there any other way I can get a lead on this? Just as he was pondering what to do, he got a phone call from Saeki. Apparently there were new developments to the case.



Enokida still remembered the events from eight years ago perfectly.

‘He’s an illness. Nothing could cure him.’ It was a few days after he overheard that man utter those words.

Enokida was frozen stiff when Yagi came into his room abruptly without knocking. *Something must have happened*, he thought to himself just as he was

grabbed by the arm and forced into a car. Yagi sat in the seat their professional driver usually was in, while Enokida was put into the passenger's seat. Yagi kept a firm hold on the wheel with an intimidating demeanor, not allowing any room for rebuttal or questioning.

After a few minutes, the car arrived to an abandoned warehouse, deserted of people. Yagi got out of the car and ordered in a low voice, "please get out of the car."

Once Enokida stepped out of the vehicle as instructed, there was a metallic clink sound. Enokida instantly swallowed and slowly turned around to face him. Yagi was holding a revolver towards him. What Enokida had heard was the sound of the gun being cocked.

".....Are you going to kill me?"

Enokida inquired. Oddly enough, he was calm. Perhaps it was because he knew that this would happen somewhere in his mind.

"All of this is the master's orders." Yagi answered him with a cold, emotionless voice. "Let us end this."

'I'm well aware of it.' That man had said. 'He's an illness. Nothing could cure him.' If Enokida was incurable, then there was no choice but to erase him.

Yagi's job was to eliminate anyone who served as an interference to that man. Enokida was no exception to that.

"Is it because I'm an eyesore? Because I'm in his way?"

Yagi provided no answer when he asked. Nonetheless, his eyes told him, 'yes.' Immediately following that, there was a dry sound. It was the first gunshot he had heard. Startled by the sound, Enokida spontaneously shut his eyes tight.

However, the bullet did not hit Enokida.

Yagi had missed on purpose.

".....Yagi?"

Why? He opened his eyes and peered at Yagi's face. *Why didn't you kill me?* He gazed at him with a look somewhere between condemnation and dependency.

The man then said quietly.

“Please run away.”

Enokida thought he had misheard. Upon hearing the word ‘run,’ he was thrown into confusion.

Yagi handed him a piece of paper.

“This is a plane ticket heading for Fukuoka. An acquaintance of mine is in Hakata. Please go to him whenever you have any issues. He will surely be of help to you.”

“But if you don’t kill me, then you’ll-”

That man’s orders were final. If Yagi did not obey them, then his position was at risk too.

“Please leave the rest to me.” Yagi told him firmly. “I will convincingly deceive him.”

Everyone in his household well knew this man’s ability. As long as it was him, he would be able to deceive that man.

Enokida nodded. He did not voice any gratitude. “.....I got it.”

“Young master, please do take care of yourself.”

Those were the last words they exchanged with each other.

“.....I’ve recalled unpleasant memories because of you.” Enokida stated, a sigh mixed in, before bringing his coffee to his lips. The bitter flavor spread over the palate on his tongue.

There had been no one else but Yagi who had looked over Enokida since he was young in place of his busy parents. Perhaps he could not kill Enokida, regardless of his master’s orders. It was similar with the story of Snow White in the Grimm Fairy Tales. The queen had ordered the huntsman to assassinate the princess, but out of compassion the huntsman spared her. He left her in the forest and lied to the queen that he had killed her. Yagi had also covered up Enokida’s death instead of killing him.

“Don’t tell me you forgot. You pointed a gun at me eight years ago.”

“Was that not your own undoing though?” Yagi said opposingly. “You had gotten yourself involved in crime and had troubled the master.”

“Isn’t it the parent’s responsibility behind their child’s behavior?” Enokida objected defiantly. “I think anyone would have strayed from the right path had they gone through that overbearing education during puberty.”

“Straying from the path that way is hardly endearing.” Yagi was never at a loss of words, even though he was a mere servant. “You hacked into the police headquarter’s database at a crucial period of time for the master after all.”

Enokida’s father was a politician. No, Enokida could not call him his father. He was a heartless man who would cut down anyone close to him to protect his status and well being. The father in Enokida’s memories was expressionless and had a cold gaze. Enokida only had that impression to him. He despised him. As such, he attempted to cause him trouble.

Enokida’s crime was discovered during the middle of elections. He had no idea how much money that man had to spend in order to cover up the incident.

“At any rate,” Enokida spoke up and declined Yagi’s request. “It doesn’t matter to me whatever happens to that man.”

At that response, the tone in Yagi’s voice had changed.

“Do you truly believe that?” His gentle demeanor suddenly turned cold. “If the master’s secrets are exposed, then your current life is at risk as well.”

“When that happens, then I’ll just flee somewhere overseas.”

“Enokida-san.”

That was a first; the first time Yagi had called him by his current name. Not ‘young master’ but Enokida. He felt a strange and yet familiar wickedness to the unfamiliar sound in the other’s voice.

The smile had disappeared from Yagi’s face.

“It would be problematic if you misunderstand. I am not giving you this request as an old friend; I am offering you a job on professional grounds.”

Yagi told him and took out a check from his pocket. There were seven zeros following the character one written on it.

“This would be your payment for the assignment. If you are dissatisfied with that, then I do not mind doubling it.”

Enokida was at a loss for words. He could only glare at the man in front of him silently.

Yagi then gave him a final blow.

“You call yourself a professional in this field, am I right? Then personal feelings are irrelevant in the matter.”

Enokida tutted in his mind. There was no way he could refuse after saying that to him. After all, he had his pride as an informant.

“.....I’ll find who it is right away.” Enokida smirked forcibly, putting up a front. “Go and enjoy sightseeing in Fukuoka until then.”

Bottom of the Third Inning

The cell phone Chegar used was developed in .mmm and was designed to counter advanced hacking. After the password was put in wrong three times, the cellular device would explode and break into small fragments so a round robin attack could not be possible. And by the chance he handed it over to the enemy, the device contained data that he could set to change into an explosive device as a weapon.

To make a call on this device, he had to use the organization’s mail server. It was protected by a multiple layered firewall surveillanced by an elite unit twenty-four-seven. The system was set up so that only people from the organization and select few could only send and receive calls. Irasawa and Siva were both provided these cellular devices which completely shut down outside attacks and viruses.

A half a day after they captured macro-hard, Chegar received a call from Siva who had been tasked with dealing with macro-hard’s computer. Siva had told him, “I found something that would interest you. Come by my shop.”

Chegar immediately headed over to his repair and maintenance shop. He entered the store and took a step into Siva’s room. Siva was presently working on a computer.

Chegar received a message from Irasawa shortly after he got inside.

“.....He’s finally done with him, huh.”

When he opened up the message, there was a video file attached. Irasawa had filmed himself killing the other man. He had fixed the camera onto the wall of the ring first before proceeding to beat up his opponent. After he had weakened macro-hard, he then took the camera in hand and began hacking away at the man while filming close to his victim’s face as he slowly died. The video clearly showed macro-hard’s anguished face and captured Irasawa’s laughter.

Chegar had not wanted to see that.

“I told him not to send it to me.....” Chegar said, brushing a hand over his head.

Although Irasawa could have just sent him a message with just “I finished,” he always sent him videos instead.

“He can’t help it. He wants to boast to someone.” Siva shook his head and smiled. “He was in the spotlight when he was a boxer, but now he has to avoid standing out. He wants to be seen by someone and be praised. He’s the same as a child.”

You’re more of the child, he bit down those words.

“So,” Chegar started the main discussion. “What did you find out?”

“Take a look at this,” Siva pointed to one of his computer screens – specifically macro-hard’s computer. There were folders everywhere on it; roughly around thirty. When Chegar examined it closer, each folder had a person’s name on it.

“What are these?”

“Put simply, they are folders containing his spoils from extortion.”

“Spoils from extortion?”

“Macro-hard got a hold of people’s secrets with his hacking abilities and used it to demand money from them.”

“All of these guys?”

There were names among them that Chegar had seen before. All of them were famous people from politicians and comedians to sports players. There were even some names of executive police personnel. Macro-hard had used a virus to send threats to people and show them some dark secrets he had obtained.

“The issue is this man.”

Siva then pointed to a folder with the name Kazuo Matsuda.

It was a name anyone would recognize. “Matsuda.....As in that congress member?”

Siva nodded. “This man apparently has used some unclean methods behind the scenes.”

“Well, any politician would do that, right?” *What’s so special about him?* Chegar scoffed. “He has nothing to do with us.”

“He especially does.”

“.....What do you mean?”

“According to macro-hard’s information, Kazuo Matsuda has a son, and that son was apparently arrested for hacking a long time ago. Naturally, his father had covered up the incident.” Siva was surprisingly entertained, adding on. “And the hacking that son did was similar to him.”

“Similar to whom?”

“Blackleg.”

“.....Did you say Blackleg?” Chegar’s eyes had widened at the mention of that name. “Are you sure?”

He was an infamous hacker under the codename balckleg_nameko. An associate of Chegar’s in the organization was attacked by him just the previous day and had information extracted from him. Blackleg was listed on .mmm’s blacklist.

“There’s no mistaking it. His skills were more sloppy back then compared to

now, but he has the same habit when hacking.”

The hacker was similar to an appropriationist. Just like someone would sign a picture they drew as an indication it was their work, this hacker would leave evidence as proof of his own achievements. He did this especially so he could show off more than just getting money by being recognizable.

“Blackleg made an automatic information disclosure virus called Flammulina. It was a virus he would attach to downloadable files that would infect the computer as soon as the videos and images were downloaded.”

Flammulina – Chegar had heard rumors about it.

“The virus Matsuda’s son had used at the time was the first version of Flammulina.” Siva explained as he kept his focus on the screen. “This son had always been at odds with his father. He didn’t want to become a politician and started playing around with hacking. And around that time was when his father had to cover up the incident.”

“So where is that son of his now?” That was the important question.

“On record, it is stated he died in a car accident eight years ago.”

“Blackleg is dead?”

“Seemingly dead.” Siva pointed to the screen again. “Look at this here. According to the information macro-hard found, a doctor he was acquainted with wrote up his death certificate and used that to fake the boy’s death. Naturally, they were made to do it by someone else.”

“Does that mean the son became an interference?”

“A few days before the car accident, Matsuda had purchased a plane ticket for Fukuoka with his credit card. But the man himself was attending a party in the city on the day of departure, so he didn’t go to Fukuoka.”

After Matsuda had bought the ticket for Fukuoka, his son had disappeared. “Then the one who used that plane ticket-”

“There’s a high possibility it was blackleg.”

This was an unprecedented development. Chegar was impressed that they caught the big fish blackleg from the second-rate hacker, macro-hard.

“So he faked his death and fled to Fukuoka?” Chegar muttered with a hand placed to his chin. “Then look up any traces of blackleg out there.”

“I already did that.” Siva smiled. “Looks like he broke into the cyber division’s database, cracking into a hacker investigator’s records. And the method of hacking done to a credit card company a some time ago is exactly the same method as blackleg’s. He was looking into the payment history of a man named Noriaki Hayashi. A person from there received the Flammulina virus to take away a manager’s authority.”

“Is it really blackleg’s doing?”

“He used a proxy to avoid suspicion, but it wasn’t so much so that I couldn’t follow the lead. There’s hardly any difference between the two. And it doesn’t look like the person who did this was trying to hide his method or anything. I assume an investigator in the cyber division and blackleg were collaborating behind the scenes. Otherwise blackleg’s whereabouts would have been found out, and he would’ve been arrested by now.”

That was not uncommon. Chegar often heard of the government or police hiring criminals that had high quality skills or knowledge.

“When I looked around, I found the signal coming from an internet cafe in Nakasu.”

Siva had already figured out the man’s location. He was skilled. It made Chegar feel envious. If he had roughly the same amount of talent as this man, he could be active at the forefront of his division by now. Chegar shook his head to disperse those meaningless thoughts.

“He used a computer in booth 506.” Siva hacked into the internet cafe’s system and looked up the guest records. “The guest who was in booth 506 on that date is this guy.”

The man’s form was clearly captured by the footage of the facility’s surveillance cameras.

“Found him.” Siva exclaimed. “Here’s your countenance.”

Siva adjusted the footage to enlarge it closer to the man’s face. He looked gaudy and had mushroom-like hair. Half of his face was hidden by his long

bangs, but he had characteristic features.

“He’s blackleg, huh.....”

Chegar carefully examined the young man’s smiling face, enthralled by him.

Fourth Inning

Top of the Fourth Inning

There seemed to be a new development in the serial murders of the homeless case. Lin was called up by Saeki to meet him, so he headed to his clinic after examination hours. Saeki let Lin in and brought him to a secret room further in the clinic. It was fairly dark with a table placed in its center, giving the impression of an autopsy room.

“Take a look at this body,” Saeki prompted Lin.

It was not a photo of a body but a real one this time. When Lin pulled back the vinyl sheet what he saw was the bare body of a man.

“The same culprit had sent another again.”

Lin examined the body laid on the table closely. From his build and skin complexion, Lin guessed the man was in his late twenties or early thirties. Just like the others, he had been brutally punched in the face as it was terribly swollen. And his mouth was agape. “His front teeth were pulled out too.”

“Yes,” Saeki nodded. “What do you suppose his intention is by doing that?”

Spoils – What Banba had told Lin passed through his mind. Perhaps whoever did this pulled out their victim’s teeth to satisfy his desire for dominance or ownership.

“The victim had blond hair on his clothes and nails. He must have got those on him when he fought against his assailant.”

“I see.” The culprit had blond hair then.

“Here are the man’s possessions.”

Saeki handed him over a standard smartphone and a wallet. There were a few ten thousand yen bills inside the wallet; the man’s personal belongings he had on hand were left untouched.

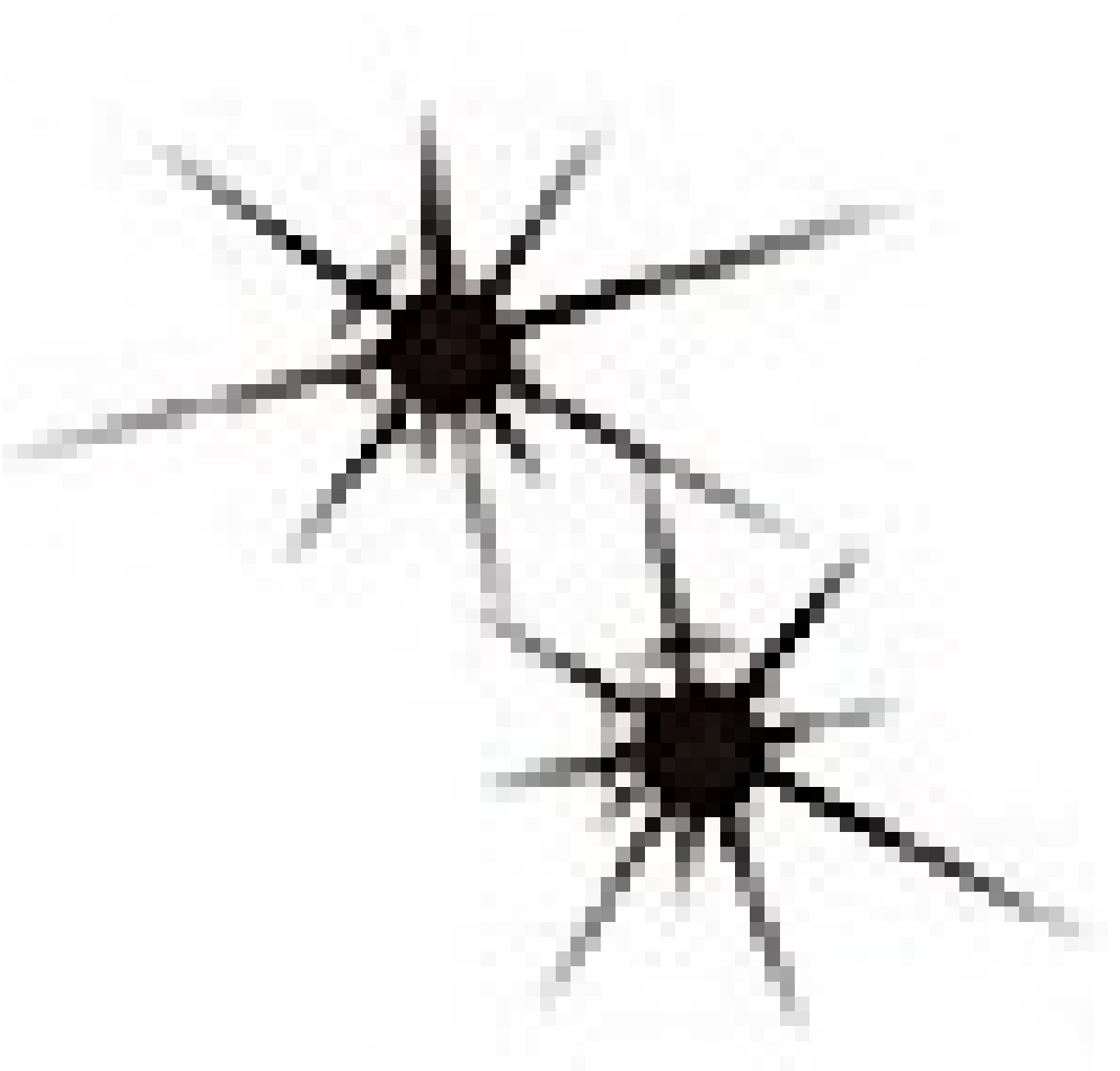
“This means the guy wasn’t aiming for this man’s money.”

“So it appears to be the case.”

There was even a driver’s license. His name was Manabu Kuroiwa. He lived at Yakuin in the central ward of Fukuoka City; it was not far from here.

“Good, this guy has a home.”

All the other victims were homeless, but Kuroiwa was not one of them. If he could examine the victim’s room, then Lin could possibly find some kind of lead on the culprit. Lin immediately headed over to Kuroiwa’s place.



The restaurant Gen-Chan was currently in the middle of preparing to open. Banba took a seat and gave his report on the job as Genzo worked briskly in front of him.

“.....He killed himself you say?” Genzo stopped what he was doing and

glanced over to him wide-eyed.

“Yeah. I found him dead when I got there.” Banba explained that Aoyagi had hung himself.

“It ain’t someone who killed him and made it look like a suicide, right?”

“Shigematsu-san said it was a suicide through and through.”

The bruises from the rope on his neck were natural. Although someone could have threatened him to hang himself, Aoyagi had a motive to commit suicide.

“He had a lot of pressure. After he quit the company, he was a shut-in.”

“Well, he deserved it, right?” Genzo shrugged. “He caused people a lot of trouble.”

“But he denied it.” Banba did not imagine Aoyagi had been lying. “He left a note. He wrote that he didn’t do it.”

“Really?” Genzo leaned forward, intrigued.

“Dontcha reckon’ this is awfully similar to Saitou-kun’s case earlier?”

Saitou was dangerously close to being arrested for sending threats, obstruction of business, and having child pornography. His computer had operated on its own due to a remote functioning virus, writing up posts on murder and exploding places on the internet and saving photos of naked girls. And even his SNS account was hacked.

“Someone might have used hacking to set Aoyagi up.”

“Hackers are a dangerous bunch.”

Banba nodded with Genzo. “Enokida-kun looks cute in comparison to these guys.”

Enokida had the ability to push people to death, but he had no interest in doing so.

“That’s right; speaking of hackers,” Genzo suddenly recalled. “There’s this guy.” He placed a photo in front of Banba. It was the photo of a man.

“Who’s this now?”

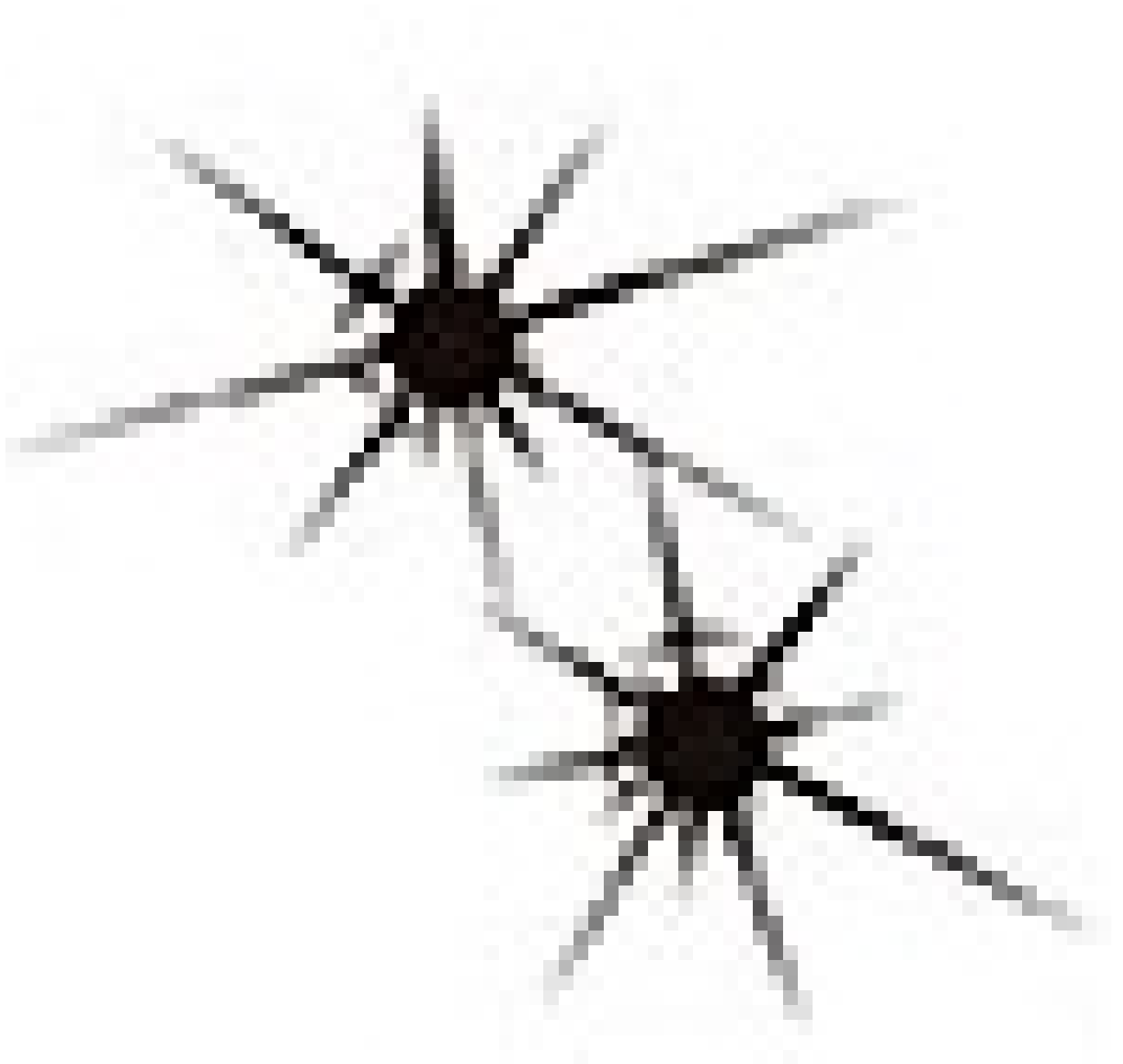
“Manabu Kuroiwa. He’s a hacker. His life is wanted by a few here and there.” Genzo then added. “Got this job from someone connected with the police. This guy apparently caught wind of them hiring a hitman to secretly kill a criminal. He threatened them to pay up or he would let it slip.”

“Oh wow.” *So he had to be erased.*

“So, how ‘bout it, Banba? Will ya take the job?”

“A hacker, huh.....”

Banba muttered as he gazed at the man’s photo. The man seemed to be a villain who extorted several people with threats. Banba did not have any particular reason to decline.



Enokida was upset that he was working for that man’s sake, but he could not

back down after Yagi provoked him that much. That servant had always been good at riling him up. That irritated him a bit.

He found out who the person behind the threat was. Or more accurately, he heard rumors of him. He was a hacker going under the name of macro-hard, and his real name was Manabu Kuroiwa. He had been very openly active as of late, which resulted in him bringing attention to himself from various people.

Macro-hard's hideout was a five minute walk from Yakuin Main Street Station. Enokida decided to sneak into Kuroiwa's room while he was away and copy the data on his computer. He had to confirm if this man was indeed macro-hard and if he was the one who sent the threat for certain first. If he could find proof, then he could leave the rest to Yagi to clean up.

Kuroiwa's place was room 202. Enokida pressed the intercom, but there was no reply. Just as he went to turn the door knob, he noticed something odd: it was unlocked. Enokida quietly opened the door and peered inside. He did not feel any person's presence. He stepped inside stealthily. The windows were covered by black curtains, shrouding the room in darkness. It was hard to see, so he looked again carefully; there was indeed no one inside.

Maybe Kuroiwa forgot to lock the door. The single room was terribly cluttered. It looked like someone had went berserk in here and was in a rush to leave. And what was even more baffling was that there was not even a single computer in the room, despite it being the home of a hacker.

Did he get involved with something? Or did he take his stock-in-trade and ran out into the night?

Enokida cocked his head in confusion in the center of the small room. Enokida went to flip the light switch to examine the room closer when he heard the door opening abruptly.

Someone came.

Enokida's breath caught in his throat. He could see a silhouette at the entrance. He did not have the time to hide; the figure walked right over to where he was in a moment. By the time Enokida realized it, his body was pushed down onto the ground by the other. Something glinted in front of his eyes – it was a knife. The figure had taken it out.

Dammit, a hitman? Enokida twisted in an attempt to get out of the other's grasp, but he was unable to. His assailant was putting their weight on him, preventing him from moving.

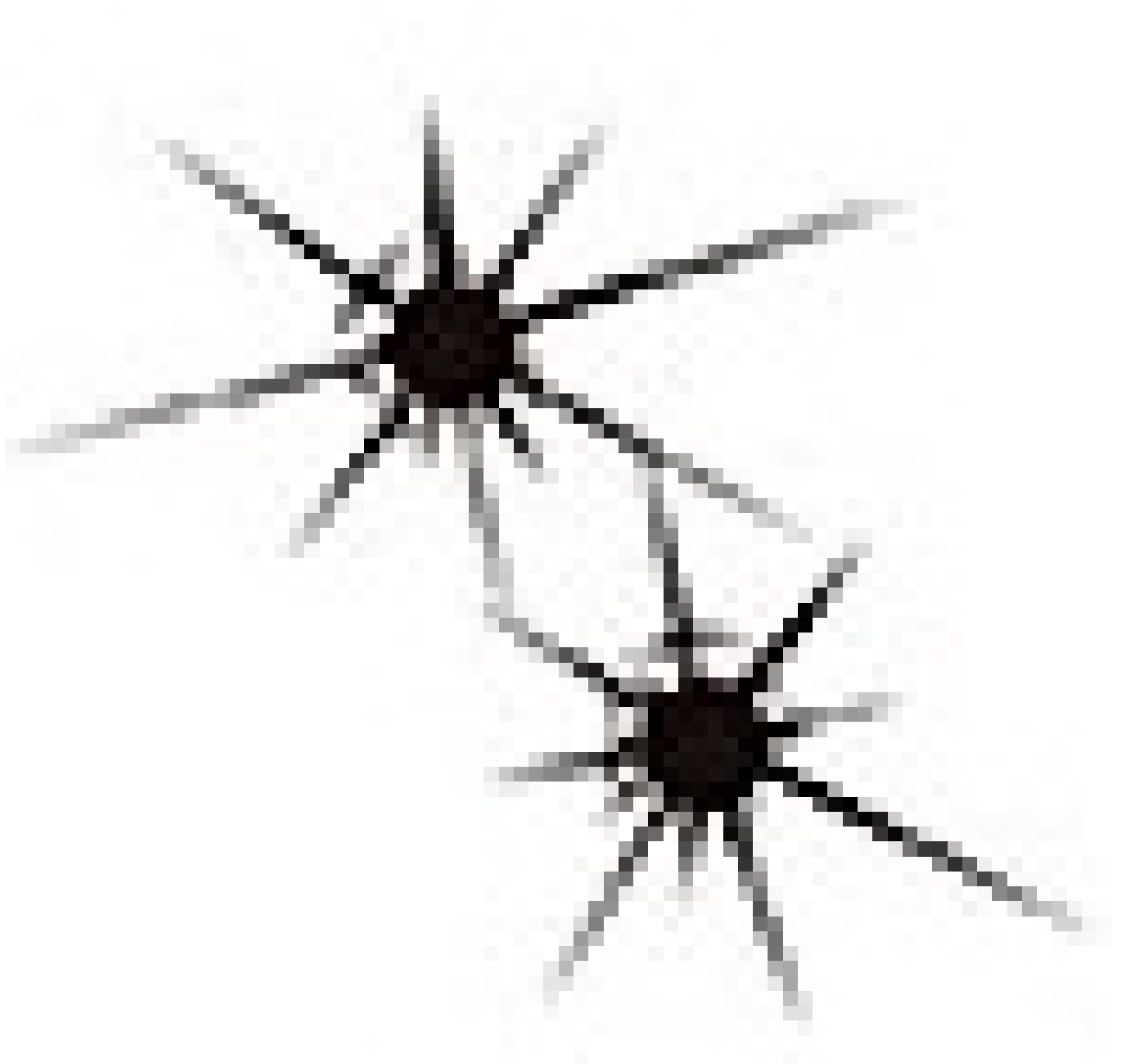
“Ah?”

The moment the hitman went to swing the knife down, they suddenly raised their voice.

The person's long hair grazed against Enokida's cheek.

“.....What the hell. It's just you, mushroom?”

When Enokida looked closer, he saw it was a familiar face. It was Xianming Lin.



When Lin went to Manabu Kuroiwa's home, the door was unlocked. He

entered to see someone inside. It could have been the one who killed Kuroiwa. Wary, Lin made his attack. He swiftly pushed the other over, pressing him with his weight from above to seal his mobility. Just as he raised his knife, he realized it was Enokida. His raised arm instantly came to a stop.

“.....What a shock.”

Enokida gave a deep sigh as he stood up.

“Don’t startle me.”

“That’s my line.” Lin folded his knife back and put it away, also giving a sigh. “I almost killed you.”

“What are you doing here?”

“Likewise,” Lin questioned back.

“I had a bit of business with the person who lives here.”

“He’s dead.”

“.....Eh?”

“The guy who lives here. Manabu Kuroiwa, right? He was killed. His body was brought to Saeki’s place.”

“Who was he killed by?”

“Don’t know,” Lin shook his head. “As if I would know something you don’t.”

Lin was looking into who had killed Kuroiwa. He thought he would learn something by coming here. He hoped there would be a clue left here, anyway.

“.....Looks like someone got here first,” Lin muttered as he took a look around the room after he turned the light on. The room was trashed; probably done by whoever killed Kuroiwa.

“There are no computers.”

“Then perhaps the culprit took them?” The person’s objective may have been the computers.

“He should have a data backup somewhere. Like another spare computer or a smartphone.” Enokida raised both of his hands. “But with the state this room is

in, the guy may have also taken the backup.”

“Ah,” Lin exclaimed. That reminded him that he received Kuroiwa’s personal belongings from Saeki. “If you need his smartphone, I got it.”

He took the device out and handed it to Enokida.

“But it is locked, and you can’t see inside it.”

“That’s not an issue. A mere four-digit passcode is easy enough to crack.”

It was best to leave this matter to him. “Alright then, you can give it a shot. Do whatever you like with it.”

Enokida gave a nod back in reply.

Abruptly, Lin felt something off. What is this feeling? Lin glanced around the area, searching for it.

“What is it?” Enokida asked him.

“I feel like someone is watching us.....”

Lin felt someone’s gaze on them, but he did not sense any person’s presence.

“.....There it is.” Lin turned around and pointed. “It’s a hidden camera.”

There was a large bookshelf against one of the walls. A dog plushie sat on the top shelf. Examining it closer, Lin could see the eyes of its eyes were of a different color.

“It looks like the dog’s left eye is a camera lens.”

“So he left a surveillance camera? He may have been cautious since his life was targeted.” Enokida suggested. “Still, you noticed that quickly. As expected of a hitman.”

The camera was situated in a high place. Lin would have to use some sort of stool in order to reach it.

“I can get it for you. I’m taller.”

Enokida boasted.

“Ha?” Lin could not let that statement go. “I’m definitely taller.”

“How? I’m the taller one.”

“Alright, then how about we compare?”

“I was just thinking about doing that.”

The two stood back-to-back against each other, comparing their heights.

“See? I’m taller, right?”

“No, I am. You’re wearing heels. That’s cheating.”

“But you’re wearing those thick soles.” Lin pointed to Enokida’s shoes.

Enokida snorted. “I would still win even if I took them off.”

“Yeah, no.” Lin countered. “Hey, don’t stand on your tiptoes.”

“I’m not. You are.”

It was then. They heard the sound of the door opening. They returned to themselves. Someone had arrived. Lin and Enokida looked at each other and panicked. They were not in the situation to be comparing their height. Lin immediately took out his weapon from his pocket and turned his attention towards the entrance.

“Ah.”

A man wearing a black suit and a Niwaka mask stood there – it was Banba.

They relaxed. “.....It’s just you?”

“Banba-san.” Enokida also sighed in relief. “Don’t startle us.”

There were such occurrences as coincidences. But the chances of three acquaintances to arrive at the same place were low.

“What was you guys doin’?” Banba removed his Niwaka mask, wide-eyed.

“Comparing heights.”

“Which of us do you think is taller?”

When Lin asked Banba, he looked between the two and said. “Hmmm.....you both look ‘bout the same to me.”

“.....”

“.....”

Lin got mad at Banba's impassive answer and scowled. Enokida also frowned in dissatisfaction.

Banba looked around the room, paying no mind to them.

"Do ya feel somethin' watchin' us?"

He also seemed to have noticed the hidden camera. "That must be it," he walked over to the bookshelf and reached for the dog plushie from the top shelf.

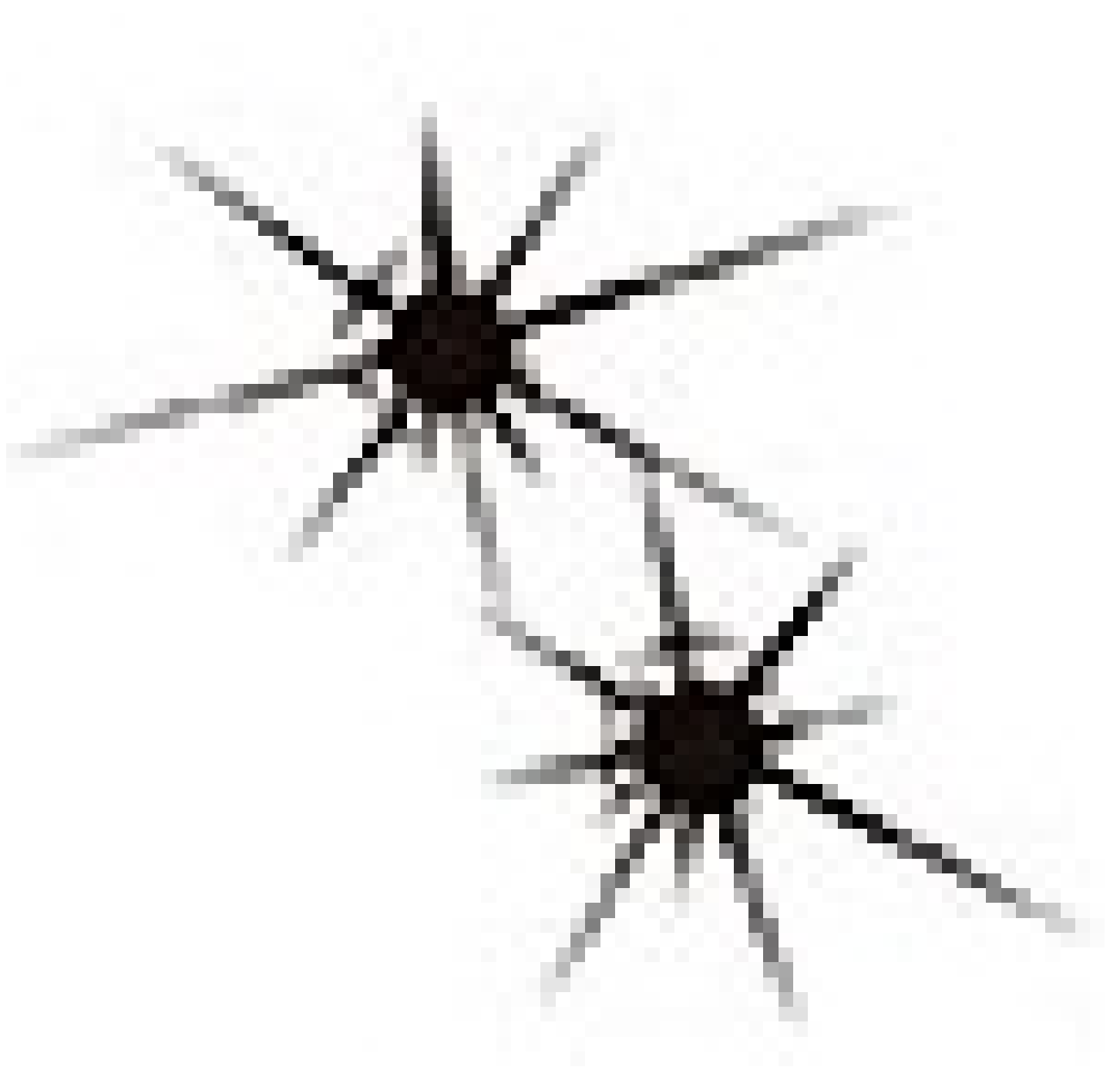
"Here we go," Banba had grabbed the item with ease. "There's a camera here."

"....."

"....."

Lin and Enokida glared at Banba wordlessly.

".....What is up with your expressions?" Banba tilted his head with a baffled look. "What's up with you two?"



Lin cut open the dog plushie with his knife to look inside it. They found a small camera inside the cotton. The footage on here would have recorded what had happened to Kuroiwa in this room.

They connect the device to the TV and watched the footage displayed on the screen intently. First there were three men that barged into the room. They were all wearing movers' uniforms. Because they were wearing hats and masks, it was difficult to see their faces.

"Who are these guys?" Banba whispered as he watched the screen.

"Who knows."

"The only thing we know for certain is that they're not movers."

Among the three, the tall man had grabbed Kuroiwa and covered his mouth.

He seemed to have had Kuroiwa inhale a drug and put him to sleep. The man then stuffed him into a bag and carried him out. They had kidnapped him.

The other men then went to take all the computers in the room and took off shortly after.

“So they were after the computers,” Enokida said.

They must have dressed as movers so they would not stand out when they carried out objects from the room.

“This guy may be the one I’m looking for.” Lin pointed to the large blond man carrying Kuroiwa. “I was looking into the serial murders of the homeless, and Kuroiwa was killed in the exact same way as them.”

According to Lin, the culprit had a high possibility of having blond hair.

Lin looked back to the footage again and whispered, “this guy could be him.”

“He was brought somewhere else alive and then killed.”

“Maybe he was tortured for information?”

“No, he didn’t have any signs of being bound.”

They focused on the footage again. Afterwards, nothing had particularly happened until Enokida had arrived. Finishing the footage, Enokida took out the data chip. “I’ll do some digging and find where these guys went. And I’ll check the data on his smartphone too. I’ll contact you once I figure it out.”

“Yes, please.” Lin nodded.

After they left the apartment building and said their farewells to Enokida, Banba returned to his car parked at the coin parking. Lin got in the passenger’s seat.

“So that Kuroiwa is dead, you said?”

“Yeah. His body was sent to Saeki’s place. There’s no doubt that the blond guy in that video was the culprit.” Lin answered as he put his seat belt on.

“I did a fool’s errand again.”

Banba gave a small sigh. His target had committed suicide the other day, and now this one was murdered. Circumstances seemed to have moved ahead of

him.

“You’re off right now, right? Help me with my job.” Lin said. He meant his job with the serial homeless murder cases. “I’m going to swing by the mediator’s place, so how about you ask the homeless people about what’s going on?”

“Ehhh, I’m not available,” Banba rejected the offer. He wanted to go home as soon as possible. “I can’t see the baseball game then.”

“They’re going to lose regardless.”

“Wha-”

His complexion changed when Lin stated that.

“What do ya mean by that?”

Lin chuckled with Banba pouting next to him.



After Lin got out of the car at Nakasu, he told him “get to work,” before heading off, leaving Banba behind. He then headed to the usual food stall.

“Hey, Lin.” The owner Genzo greeted him when he pulled back the shop curtains. “How’re ya doin’?”

“I can’t say it’s going well.”

Progress on the job was poor. Although he found the group that was likely the culprits, he had no other lead than that.

“You alone today?”

“Yeah. I have something I want to ask you,” Lin took a seat and brought up the main issue on his mind. “Do you know any hitmen that pulls out the front teeth of a dead person?”

“A hitman who pulls out a dead person’s front teeth?” Genzo tilted his head in confusion. “What on earth is that question?”

“This guy would beat up and cut up his victims and then pull out their front teeth. Have you heard any rumors of a hitman doing something like that?”

Lin took out the photo of the bodies he received from Saeki and showed Genzo, “here, like this.”

“Hmmm,” Genzo crossed his arms and groaned. It did not look like anyone came to mind for him.

“I wouldn’t hire an inefficient killer like that.”

It was indeed inefficient. A professional killer should take the life of their target swiftly. They strike for the person’s vitals to kill them right away. To beat up and then stab them multiple times was something a sadistic amateur would do.

“I thought if anyone would know, it’d be you,” Lin slumped in disappointment. He was hoping that Genzo – someone involved in the industry as a mediator even after retiring and had been a hitman in this city for many years – would have at least heard rumors of someone like that, but apparently that was not the case.

But then –

“Give me a second.”

Genzo took out a scrap of paper and wrote something down.

“Alright, here. These are the mediators I know. There may be one person among them that would know.”

He told him and handed over a list of mediator names. Thirty people and their numbers were on there. Lin assumed he could find at least one lead with this.

Lin gave him his thanks and left the restaurant.



In the end, Banba was pressed to help with Lin's job. He was ordered to gather information by word-of-mouth from the homeless, so he first headed to any public facility that was a likely spot for homeless people to go to. Once he found a homeless person and asked, "have you seen a suspicious man around recently," he only received these kinds of replies:

"I don't know."

"Hey, mister. Can you give me some money?"

"A suspicious man? If you're lookin' for a exhibitionist, there are quite a few down that street."

He changed locations from Hakata to Tenjin and called out to people one sidedly. After the fifteenth person – a man he found sleeping in the park –

Banba finally got a lead. “Actually, the old timer was talking about some stranger.”

“Old timer?”

“He lived around here. He was my senior.”

“Do you know where that old man is now?”

“Don’t know,” the man cocked his head. “I haven’t seen the old timer recently.”

“Did he move somewhere else?”

“Don’t imagine he would. He left his home here.”

The place the man pointed to was a stack of cardboard and a vinyl sheet.

“Did something happen to him?” The other man inquired. He seemed interested in the matter. “Truth is, from what I could tell, he was a police detective in the past. Though he doesn’t look like it now,” the man smiled self-ridiculously.

“He was framed and got fired.”

Those words clicked with Banba. “Framed and got fired.” It resonated with him from somewhere before – it was like that note earlier. The person who hung himself: Yusuke Aoyagi’s suicide note. He also proclaimed that he was innocent. He was set up by someone and had no choice but to quit the company.

“Can you tell me more about it in detail?”

Even though it was now September, the night was humid and hot. Banba gave the homeless man a chilled juice drink for payment, and the man grinned, showing his yellowed teeth.

After they took a seat on the park bench, the former police detective vagrant spoke. “Mister, do you know of the Cracker?”

“The Cracker?” Banba recited the term and tilted his head. “Like those things that pop?”

“No, not those. I mean the freelance hitman in this city.” The man continued.

“He kills people with hacking.”

“With hacking? How?” Banba was surprised. Did that mean they killed their target without directly touching them?

“He kills them off socially by putting a crime on them.” The man explained his tactics. “For example, if there was a politician, he would want his rival to be taken care of, right? Even if they requested a hitman to assassinate them and showcase it as an accident or suicide, it would still look suspicious, right? However, *he* is different. He wouldn’t eliminate his target; he would set them up so they could lose their credibility and renown publically.”

“.....I see.”

“He would expose their dark secrets or frame them for a crime to destroy their life. It doesn’t even matter if they’re true or not. Once they become rumors, it would be over for them. There is no other kind of hitman more frightening to people in occupations dependent on public favor than him.”

There were free risks for the client. And if the Cracker did well enough, he could push someone to commit suicide – just like Aoyagi.

“I was chasing that hitman down for years. But just when I thought I got a trail on him, he countered me. He made an attack on me. He framed me, a detective, as a criminal.”

“What did he do?”

“He made my computer purchase drugs. And then at some point, the actual products were put into my house. That guy is meticulous. He even used my credit card for it. Someone used my money, pretending to be me.”

The man was then fired and lost all of his money. Then his life ended with him becoming homeless. This police detective, who had a strong sense of justice, was framed for being a drug addict. He was killed off socially. It was terrifying.

“.....A hitman, huh.”

Banba groaned to himself.



‘Doesn’t look like a hitman I would hire.’ The middle-aged woman working at the lottery told him. She was one of the mediators Genzo knew. ‘Besides, I haven’t gotten any jobs for the assassination of homeless people recently.’

Lin dropped the call and sighed. He called the list of mediators he received from Genzo and asked about the man he was looking into. This woman was the last on the list, but in the end he got nothing out of it.

Guess I should go home. Lin unwilling gave up and got onto the bus.

Is there no other way to get information? He thought over his options as he was shaken in the vehicle. He suddenly recalled. *Actually, there’s an underground website that collects information from the underworld.*

Then maybe Lin could find rumors on the man who pulls out people’s teeth

on that site.

Lin took out his smartphone and opened the top page for Undergroundjobs.com Fukuoka version.

He put in the search engine the keyword: front teeth. He hit the enter key.

Search results – 0 cases.

“.....Guess I can’t find anything on it.”

Should I try another term? He recalled the blond man from the hidden camera footage. This time he searched ‘blond hair.’

Search results – 5 cases.

He seemed to have found some. Lin’s attention was caught by one post among them.

We will pay 5,000,000 yen for the person who captures this man.

Characteristics: 165 to 170 centimeters tall, slim, blond hair.

After those sentences, a photo of a man was posted.

Lin’s eyes widened seeing the person’s face. “.....What the hell?”

Lin had to let him know of this immediately. He got off the bus and immediately made a call. However, the other did not answer. Lin just kept getting the dialing tone. The man must be talking with someone right now. This isn’t good, Lin frowned.



Enokida remained in the internet cafe, indulging himself in his work. When he looked into the backup files on the smartphone, he found hidden secrets of various famous people in macro-hard's data files. There was no mistake that macro-hard was the person behind the threat to Kazuo Matsuda. Macro-hard even had a grasp on the crime his son did that he covered up.

But although macro-hard was killed, the problem still remained. There were people who took his data: the three people shown in the hidden camera footage. It was only a matter of time before they to go through macro-hard's data and find Matsuda's secret. Even though the person who sent him the threat was no longer in their world, it was still valid since the data was taken by the three. They needed to be shut down.

First, Enokida had to figure out who they were.

He attempted to figure out their identities from the footage, but it was not possible. They made sure to hide their faces well enough, so it was impossible without clear illumination on them. Enokida was unable to match them with any photo in the database, and he had to give up.

But a question came to mind. Why did those three kill macro-hard? Enokida could not imagine why they would, but according to Lin there was a high possibility they killed him.

But why?

Enokida had a sudden thought. What if those three's objective was the same as his? Someone whom this man had information on could have hired a professional killer to dispose of him. So they took all of Kuroiwa's computers to erase him. That would make sense to Enokida.

It was at that point that his smartphone had rung. It was an incoming call from the cyber crime investigator, Karimura, he was acquainted with.

'About that list you gave me the other day,' Karimura suddenly mentioned that case when Enokida picked up the phone. The tone of his voice was dark.

"Did you decipher it?"

'Yes. I'm sending it to you now. Take a look at it.'

Enokida looked at the computer in front of him. He just got an e-mail in. "Oh, here it is."

Enokida opened the e-mail and downloaded the attached file.

'The top secret list had names of hackers around the world. It's one of those blacklists.'

"A blacklist?"

'...mmm is a free-for-all cyber terrorist organization outwardly, but their activities are completely different on the inside.' Karimura continued. 'The executives would station their workers all over the world and have them assassinate hackers.'

Assassination of hackers – that was not a pleasant idea. "So that means their true face is a hacker assassination organization?"

‘That’s exactly what they are.’ Karimura consented. ‘The names on here are likely a list for those that have to be killed off. Last month, three hackers in America have died. Their names were on this list.’

Proficient hackers would be their enemies in a cyber war. It was not a battle where anyone could easily pull the trigger of a gun. For a cyber war, there was a limit on people who could use weapons. In short, without them, they could rise up and take predominance in the cyber war front within their country.

‘.mmm’s base is said to be in China or North Korea. There are also rumors of various cyber advanced countries are also teamed up with them. Some governments are overlooking what they do, and there are even some politicians that support them.’

Enokida opened the file he had just received. Just as Karimura told him, there was a list of hacker names. Among them, there was that man’s name too. “Macro-hard’s name is on here.”

Macro-hard was Manabu Kuroiwa. He was the hacker who had just been killed.

‘That’s not the only one. Please look at the third page.’

When Enokida did as instructed and scrowled to the third page, a familiar name caught his eye: blackleg_nameko.

‘Blackleg. Your name is listed on there as well.’

“.....It is.”

blackleg_nameko – nickname blackleg – was the codename Enokida had used in the past.

‘Someone got in and took the data on the hackers. Including your file.’ Karimura told him seriously. ‘Please be careful, Enokida-san. You’re targeted by .mmm as well.’

Bottom of the Fourth Inning

Chegar headed to Hakata Station to give his report. He sat down on the plaza bench as usual around the designated time and waited for his superior patiently. The executive had mixed into the crowd and appeared out of

nowhere without any warning. Chegar stated, still facing forward, to the man who sat down next to him on the bench, “macro-hard has been eliminated.”

“Is that so?”

“There’s just one issue.”

“And that is?” The man’s tone turned harsh.

Chegar said quietly, “it seems blackleg is in this city.”

“Blackleg is?” The man raised his voice. “Are you certain of it?”

“Yes. Siva has a lead on him.”

Chegar then explained to him all the details.

“We found information on blackleg on the data macro-hard had. Siva looked into it, and he confirmed that he’s indeed in this city.”

When the other man gave him a doubtful look, Chegar prompted him, “what would you have us do?”

“Eliminate him.” The man’s reply was immediate. “He’s a dangerous person to us. Kill him as fast as possible.”

Chegar nodded wordlessly. Naturally, that was what he had planned to do.

“But watch out for a counter from him. If you fall into that man’s hands, then there’s the possibility of us receiving the consequences. Take action once you develop a sufficient enough plan.”

Chegar did not need to be told that to do so.

Irasawa also came to Siva’s shop. He was enjoying himself, watching those videos as usual.

“It was easy. Well, he was definitely better than some old homeless guy.” Irasawa turned to face Chegar and snorted. “Hackers are little weaklings without their computers.”

Today Irasawa seemed to be watching his match with macro-hard.

“You disposed of his body, right?”

“I had a professional take care of him and his possessions.”

“Good.”

Chegar then looked over to Siva. “I got your next job. We are to eliminate blackleg.”

“Sweet!” Siva smiled lightly, pleased. “I’m itching to do it.”

“However, we have to be careful for a counter from him.”

“There’s almost a zero possibility of us falling into blackleg’s trap without me noticing.”

If they were noticed, then that was the end for them. Chegar was afraid of blackleg getting the upper hand on them and taking the information they had.

“Is there a way we can prevent him from countering us?” Chegar muttered almost to himself. He stood in silence and thought it over.

Blackleg was a dangerous being to the organization. For him to receive a warning of the damages from the organization meant he was someone they had to kill at all costs. However, if they went up against him with an unfinished plan, then there was a chance they could receive the casualties. They had to strategize a counter hacking method.

“Could you cause a transmission shutdown across all of Fukuoka to prevent him from hacking?”

“But if we do that, then we won’t be able to attack either.”

Siva replied when Chegar had a realization.

Chegar recalled what Irasawa had just proclaimed: “Hackers are weaklings without their computers.” He had an idea.

“.....You’re absolutely right, Irasawa.” A smile appeared on Chegar’s face. “We can just prevent him from using a computer.”

Translation Notes:

I really do feel there is a detail missing in the scene where Banba is talking to the homeless person and him talking to the ex detective. It feels like the homeless man was possibly the ex detective and talked in third person until Banba gave him a reward. Or Banba went to his “home” and found him. I don’t

know; this is an assumption, but I read this part a few times to make sure I didn't miss anything, and the scene is exactly as it is. I think the editor missed something, but as I translator, I can't improve upon it. So yes, it was confusing, but there's nothing I can do to clarify it as there's just no information on the scene change.

Fifth Inning

Top of the Fifth Inning

‘You’re targeted by .mmm as well.’

Karimura’s words repeated in Enokida’s head over and over.

“..... .mmm, huh.”

Their outward appearance was that of a cyber terrorist organization, but their true face was that of a hacker hitmen group – a group that was completely foreign to him. Perhaps there was a chance the group of three who kidnapped macro-hard and took his computers were connected to .mmm. The possibility was certainly there.

From .mmm’s perspective, there would be no greater hindrance in their eyes than himself. And the occupation of an info broker was one where they would easily be targeted to begin with. Enokida had found himself near death multiple times up until this point, but he had no intention of being killed so easily.

So how should he brush off the enemy? Enokida began walking over to Genzo’s shop, thinking he could devise a plan while having dinner.

Just as he was a few meters out of the Gates building, Enokida felt an eerie presence and stopped. He was being followed.

It was not his imagination. Someone was following behind him. They could be an assassin from .mmm.

“.....They’re here for me already?” Enokida whispered quietly. He did not have the time to formulate a plan.

The area I’m at is bad, he thought. This was an alleyway with few passers-by. He was basically inviting anyone to attack him.

After he started walking again,

“Hey.”

A voice called out to him from behind. Enokida turned around to see a stern-

looking man standing there. He was quite large, though not as big as Martinez. He was holding a metal pipe in his hand and was obviously someone from the underground. So he was an assassin sent by .mmm then.

“.....Do you need something from me?” Enokida inquired. He already knew what the man wanted more or less though.

The man grinned after he examined Enokida closely. “This guy is 5,000,000? This will be easy.”

5,000,000?

Before Enokida could question what that meant, the other man had moved. He rushed at him with a yell. Enokida unconsciously stepped back. The man raised the metal pipe up into the air for an attack. Enokida stooped down swiftly, dodging the attack. The metal pipe collided with the concrete wall with a high pitched bang.

The man made his next attack, facing Enokida and throwing his weapon. Enokida flung himself to the right immediately, but the assault did not end there. The man closed in on him. He made a fist and swung it, aiming for Enokida’s face.

Enokida could not dodge it. He held up both his arms over his face to block it. The man’s fist sunk into his forearm. Enokida felt the bones in his arms creak.

“Ow-”

Enokida gritted his teeth, a sharp pain jolting up his arm. Unable to stop the force behind getting punched, his small frame was blown back. He then collapsed onto the concrete. When he tried to stand up, the man had already picked up his metal pipe and swung it down, aiming for Enokida’s head. It would hit.

Dammit, Enokida grimaced.

It was then.

Suddenly, a silhouette came into his field of vision. The man was wearing black clothes and stood over Enokida as if shielding him. He held a long object in his right hand: a Japanese sword. The man swung the sword, hitting the metal

pipe out of the brute's grasp.

Enokida could only watch, stunned at the arrival of his unexpected savior. The man then gave a sharp jab with the hilt of his Japanese sword into the unarmed man's gut. The large man groaned and fell on the spot, falling unconscious.

"You alright there?"

The man turned around and held out his hand to Enokida. His speech was a familiar Hakata dialect. Enokida took that hand, and as he stood up he whispered his name. ".....Banba-san."

"You was in a pinch there. I'm glad I made it on time."

It did not seem Banba had happened to pass by. He spoke as though he knew Enokida would be attacked.

Banba asked Enokida, who was giving him a suspicious look. "Did you take a look at that undergroundjobs.com?"

Undergroundjobs.com was an underground website that gathered information on criminals and jobs. "I haven't....."

"Did you get Lin-chan's e-mail?"

"His e-mail?"

Enokida took out his smartphone, and just as he was checking his inbox,

"Ah."

He saw an e-mail from Xianming Lin just as Banba said. The subject was titled, "look at this." In the body of the message, a URL was pasted.

The link took Enokida to undergroundjobs.com Fukuoka version. He read over a post on there.

'We will pay 5,000,000 yen for the person who captures this man.

Characteristics: 165 to 170 centimeters tall, slim, blond hair.

Current Location: Nakasu 3-Chome 7-24 Hakata Ward, Fukuoka City – Gates Building 5F.'

".....It's about me."

They even ever so politely attached his photo too. It was an image of Enokida in the internet cafe.

“Yeah. You got a bounty on your head.”

A bounty of 5,000,000 yen.

Enokida finally pieced it together. The brute who attacked him just now was referring to that. Enokida glanced over to the unconscious man on the ground. He had attacked him for the money. He must have been a bounty hunter.

“My current location is already tracked, isn’t it?”

That was how he was attacked by a bounty hunter. Although, likewise, that was how Banba was able to come save him.

“Anyway, ain’t it dangerous to stay ‘round here?” Banba turned on his heel. “We’re gonna run outta here.”



‘That mushroom has a bounty on his head.’

Lin had called him to inform him of that. And apparently information regarding Enokida was posted on the internet. Lin told Banba that he had tried to call Enokida to tell him, but he was unable to contact him as he was taking a call and ended up sending an e-mail instead.

Banba got into his car and headed over to where Enokida was. It was vital he met up with him.

They returned to the car, and Enokida got into the passenger’s seat. Banba got in the driver’s seat, asking Enokida as he was fastening his seatbelt, “who did you anger now?”

No idea, Enokida shrugged.

“There are far too many that come to mind.....But this may be .mmm’s work.”

“Em three?”

“They’re an assassin organization for hackers. They use agents to kill off hackers or any skilled person who get in their way, apparently. They killed macro-hard too. And I just heard that they were after me as well. The timing is too convenient to be anyone else.”

The light turned red, making Banba step on the brakes. The pedestrians began to cross the street. During that time, Banba turned on the radio, playing the live session of a professional baseball game. ‘The pitcher made their pitch! It’s a slider! Another miss! That’s three strikes!’

“Well for now, I have to get rid of that post.”

If that post on undergroundjobs was not there, Enokida’s life would not be hunted down by bounty hunters. Enokida took out his laptop from his bag and began typing on the keyboard briskly. “I’ve infiltrated on this site once before. I made a loophole on there at that time, so I think I should be able to get in easily-”

Enokida’s fingers stopped their motion a few moments later.

“.....They got me.” Banba heard a tut from next to him.

“What’s the matter?”

Banba asked and looked over to the passenger’s seat. Enokida was dumbfounded. His complexion was unusually pale. “It was a trap.”



Enokida was careless. He glared at his computer screen while running a hand over his head.

‘We will pay 5,000,000 yen for the person who captures this man.

Characteristics: 165 to 170 centimeters tall, slim, blond hair.

Current Location: 33.598095, 130.406677: 9: 34 pm.’

The moment Enokida attempted an attack, there was a change on the post on undergroundjobs with a revision on the information. The coordinates that were listed was Shouwa Street – where they currently were at. It was the exact location where they were parked at right now.

“A trap?” Banba tilted his head in confusion.

“I tried to delete the post, but I was countered.”

Even when he deleted it, another new one was made. And this one had the most updated information on his location.

“I probably got a virus. It’s set to make an update with my current position when I go to delete the post. My location is specified based off the access point.”

“Hmmm.....And that means?”

“It means they found my location when I access the internet.”

“.....I see.” Banba groaned. “That’s no good.”

Bounty hunters visiting the site would be heading to their current location at any moment.

“Right now we need to run around to make them lose our trail.” Enokida requested.

Banba nodded and stepped on the acceleration pedal. “Then that means you shouldn’t access the internet right?”

“That’s what the enemy wants.”

A hacker was an ordinary human when their computer is taken from them. They could not make a counterattack without it.

“It means they sealed off my means of hacking.”

“That ain’t good,” Banba muttered as he gripped the wheel.

No kidding. This wasn’t good at all.

As Banba had said, in order to lose their trail, Enokida had to discard his computer. However that was like going into battle against a heavily armed army completely unarmed.

He needed to be able to set a trap for the enemy to fall into somehow.

‘Right now, we’re heading into the ninth inning.’

At some point, the baseball game had entered its final inning. The first batter made it on base with a walk.

‘There are no outs with a runner on first. Now what will they do? It does not

look like they'll be going for a bunt.' The live announcer prattled on swiftly. He spoke with a tempo like someone broadcasting for a radio commercial. 'The pitcher makes his pitch! It's a straight; it hit and it's a grounder to second base!'

Enokida remained quiet and listened to the broadcast.

'Oh no, they stopped the runner on first! They touched the runner out and threw the ball over to first!' The announcer's voice raised in excitement. 'The runner is out. And first base is safe!'

A professional baseball OB commenter spoke then. 'If they had just thrown to second base, they would have gotten a double-play normally.'

'The runner stopped right in front of them, so they went to touch him out.'

'The first base runner made himself a good decoy.'

A decoy.

Enokida had a realization.

I see. There's always that option too. "Banba-san, stop."

"Eh?"

"Let me off here."

Banba did as asked and parked on the side of the road. Enokida slipped out of the passenger's seat the very moment he did.

"Will ya be alright by yourself?" Banba questioned him with a worried expression.

"I'll contact you when I need help."

"Enokida-kun," When Enokida had turned on his heel, Banba had called out to him in a stern voice. "Take this with you."

What Banba tossed to him through the window was a baby pink baseball hat. The character R was written on it. It was part of the Ramens team uniform.

"Your hairstyle stands out."

".....I only appreciate the sentiment." Enokida tossed the hat back. "I don't like hats that much."

Banba smiled, astounded.

Enokida had no choice but to counter hacking with hacking. If he could not delete the post on the server, then he had to get rid of the server itself. The method was simple: a DDoS attack. This utilized a large number of computers as bots to mass access the website to make it inaccessible. For a cyber terrorist method, it was the basic of the most basic of tactics.

Once the server is down, no one would be able to browse the site. Enokida would be able to shake off the bounty hunters on his trail until the server rebooted.

After Enokida had left Banba, he ran, holding the laptop to his waist. He was heading to the Gates Building which was connected to the municipal subway at Nakasu Kawabata Station. Enokida needed a place where he could focus on his work. He ran through the building and got inside one of the stalls in the men's restroom. Once inside, he locked the door. He sat down on the lid of the toilet, opened his laptop which sat on his knees, and began hacking.

The tapping of keys resounded in the quiet space of the restroom. And then, Enokida felt the abrupt presence of someone outside his stall. He heard footsteps of a man. Someone had come to the restroom.

The footsteps stopped in front of Enokida's stall.

Another pursuer?

They already seemed to have pinpointed his location. Almost immediately the banging against the door started. Someone was trying to wrench open the lock. Enokida unconsciously held his breath and tried not to voice anything.

However, it was pointless to attempt not to. The sound of typing had already given away that he was in here. His pursuer was there; a door being the only barrier separating them. Yet Enokida kept hacking regardless.

After a few moments, he heard a noise from above his head. He looked up and was shocked. He could see the man's hands poking through the opening at the very top of the stall that was roughly fifty centimeters tall. This person had gotten a grab of the door itself.

Enokida was startled with the scene unfolding in front of him, like one from a

horror film.

You're kidding me. He's planning to get in this way?

Bottom of the Fifth Inning

"It looks like he noticed we are after him."

When they put blackleg's information on the internet and put a bounty on his head, they were sure blackleg would try to get on the server to delete that post. Chegar was counting on him to do so.

As planned, blackleg fell for the trap. They succeeded in counter hacking him.

Since blackleg's computer was corrupted with the virus Siva made, they would be able to figure out his whereabouts as long as blackleg was connected to the internet. Once they deciphered blackleg's current location provided by the web accesspoint, then they could easily track his movements.

Their proactive efforts seemed to have succeeded. Now their opponent was one step behind. Playing a defensive fight against in a cyber battle put blackleg at a severe disadvantage. Once he lost his computer, then the rest would be simple. Blackleg would have no other choice than to run around with his laptop in hand, which would be a mere shape of machinery at that point.

"Now then, I imagine he'll make an attempt to get away."

There were ten display screens in Siva's room. One of them had the map of Fukuoka City on its screen. The red dot moving around on it was blackleg.

Current location: 33.593075, 130.406278: at 21:45.

Blackleg was currently in Nakasu. Chegar already had Irasawa heading there. He would arrive at the place soon.

A blue dot was displayed on the map, indicating Irasawa's position. There was not even a distance of ten meters between those two dots.

"Irasawa," Chegar called Irasawa. "He entered the Gates Building."

'I'm heading there now.'

It would take no time for Irasawa to come in contact with blackleg.

After a few minutes, Chegar heard Irasawa's voice. 'I found him. He went into the restroom.'

"Alright, capture him." Chegar ordered.

However, there was no response.

"What's wrong, Irasawa?" Chegar called his name again.

A few seconds pass –

'Shit,' He heard Irasawa tut. 'He got away.'

".....He got away?" What had happened in those few seconds? "How?"

'There was a power outage. He was hiding in one of the stalls. I was here too. And then I couldn't see anything all of the sudden. When the lights came back on, he was gone.'

"He must have tapped into the building's electrical system. Blackleg hacked into it and caused a power outage."

"And then he escaped in the dark."

"No, he's still nearby." Siva glanced at the red dot on the map. As Siva said, it looked like blackleg was loitering around in the area. "It looks like he's heading to the station."

The red dot on the map was moving. Chegar ordered Irasawa to follow it.

After a few moments –

".....He stopped."

Current location: 33.5940983, 130.4056712: at 21:48.

Current location: 33.5940983, 130.4056712: at 21:50.

Current location: 33.5940983, 130.4056712: at 21:52.

The time of his current location was at 21:52. Blackleg did not move away from Nakasu Kawahashi Station.

"Irasawa," Chegar called out to him again. "He's in another restroom in the station. Just past the ticket gate."

'I'll get there soon.'

Chegar glanced over to the screen. The blue dot was moving, but the red dot remained still. It was not moving at all. Blackleg made no indication of running away. “What is blackleg doing?”

“Probably, this.”

Siva was typing on another computer. He was trying to access Undergroundjobs. However –

‘Loading.’

An error message came up in the center of the screen. Siva could not access the site.

“The server is out.”

“It seems the site has been attacked.”

“Is that blackleg’s work?”

Blackleg had made a DDoS attack and made it so no one could access the undergroundjobs website. Without the website available, bounty hunters could not go after him.

Then blackleg must have stopped moving to attack the website. But even if he had gotten rid of the bounty hunters, this could not shake them off his trail.

Current location: 33.5940938, 130.4056712: at 21:53.

They looked at the map again when the location updated. Blackleg still had not moved. There was a distance of two to three meters between the red dot and the blue dot. Irasawa was closing in on blackleg.

“Irasawa, he’s right ahead of you.”

The blue dot was now converging with the red one.

“Right there.”

Any second now, Irasawa would make contact with blackleg.

However –

‘Not here.’ Irasawa muttered. ‘He’s not here.’

“.....What did you say?” Chegar must have misheard.

‘There’s no one in the restroom. There’s only a laptop in one of the stalls.’

What’s the meaning of this? Chegar frowned in confusion. Blackleg’s current location displayed on the map was pointing to this location. They should have caught up to him. But the man himself was absent, with only the laptop left there.

Then that means –

“A decoy?”

He made of fool of us. He left his laptop behind in the restroom and ran away? No, there’s no way. Blackleg should have been using his laptop there just a second ago.

Then why was blackleg not there? Where did he disappear to?

Did blackleg immediately get up and leave as soon as he made the DDoS attack?

“But then, how did he manage to hack-”

How could he accomplish hacking without having his laptop with him?

Could it be-? Chegar swallowed.

“He got us.” He came to a realization. There was one way blackleg could have done it. “It was a virus.”

That was blackleg’s aim from the beginning.

“Blackleg infected his own computer with a remote virus.”

Sixth Inning

Top of the Sixth Inning

At that moment, Enokida had gotten on the subway and fled out of Nakasu. He then walked around the city of Tenjin, blending in with the crowd. He looked behind him multiple times, but no one was following him. His battle strategy was a success.

There was no meaning in taking down the site if the original people who put up his bounty knew his whereabouts. So Enokida decided to use his laptop as a decoy. He hid the laptop he had infected a remote virus with in the restroom so he could trick his enemies of his location. He then moved to another location while his enemies were nailed down to one spot and remotely shut down the server for undergroundjobs.

Enokida glanced at the clock. The website's server would recover soon, and his enemies would have figured out his plan. And it would be only a matter of time for them to confiscate his laptop and look through every nook and cranny in it. They would regain composure and attempt to track Enokida again.

At any rate, Enokida at least needed the bounty hunters' attention off of him. The less people after him the better. He would be able to move around easier with them gone.

Once undergroundjobs was up and running again, Enokida accessed the site and opened the page to the forum. He then immediately began to write a post: another decoy. 'I will pay 10,000,000 yen for the person who captures this man.'

"Good luck, Saitou-kun."

Enokida spoke to himself and hit the button to post the message on the forum.

Now then, what should I do next? He had to predict their mixed pitches. *What would they pitch and where would they aim? Would it be a straight ball? A curve ball? Would it be an inside pitch or an outside pitch?*

Enokida questioned to himself. If he was in his enemies' shoes, what would he do?

His laptop was now completely in the enemies' hands. They would trace him with his laptop and try to hack his smartphone. It would be better to assume they would go through all of his calls, messages, and internet history.

Then he had to take the chance. The enemy had a grasp on all of his movements. Enokida had to turn the tables on them.

To take advantage, Enokida needed to get them to stand at an even higher ground. The more he could open a distance between them, the more likely they would be unwilling to relieve the pitcher from their winning streak. Enokida needed to make them think they got him, to make them relax. If he could make that happen, then they would let their guard down. Enokida could sneakily get around them.

And to do that, he needed assistants. Capable bots (friends) who could take action where the enemy would not see them.

First, Enokida had to make contact with his friends without the enemy noticing. He wrote a few quick messages:

'Thank you for the present. I like it.'

'I told you to treat me next time, right? I'd like to go out and have yakiniku.'

'About that celebration party, I reserved us a spot at a restaurant next to the national highway. At 11 pm.'

'Yamato was good at stealing bases during the last match at Gannosu.'

The messages were all addressed to different people. Enokida sent them all out at once.

Only using high tech did not equvalate an intelligence battle. Spies had used pigeons to make contact with people in the past after all.

There were tasks Enokida could do even without a computer – more simple and primitive methods.



That day, Saitou was in high spirits. After he had quit working for Murder Inc, his life had tumbled down. The days of his life being targeted by hitmen for something and running into danger still had persisted. But at long last, he could possibly say farewell to that checkered life. He finally found another job. And this time, it was a *completely normal* corporation that was fairly known in Fukuoka.

“That’s good to hear. Congrats.” Genzo, hearing the news from Saitou, gave him a broad smile which made wrinkles form at the edges of his eyes. “Here, this is my treat.”

Saitou had a bashful smile as he took the alcohol he was given for celebration. “Thank you so much!”

“This is the beginning of your second life.”

Saitou toasted with Genzo and gulped down his beer. *This is a good evening*, he thought. It had been a long time since he had last had such a delicious drink. He was unbearably happy. He finally would be working as a normal corporate employee.

The company had told him, “you can start first thing tomorrow.” It would be a disgrace if he was late for his first day of work; he had to be there at all costs. *I guess I shouldn’t drink too much*, Saitou quickly cut himself short and left Genzo’s restaurant.

He walked through Nakasu partially tipsy. The night breeze felt great against him. He felt peaceful, undisturbed by the other drunkards on the street or the noisy groups of university students. He was almost home. He would go home early and get ready for work the next day, and so he picked up his pace.

Just as Saitou turned the corner, a figure came into his field of vision abruptly. A man stood before his apartment. He was a ill-bred-looking, large man.

The man looked over at Saitou and smirked.

“You Saitou?”

For some reason, the man knew his name.

“.....Yes?” Saitou’s mouth dropped open and tilted his head in confusion. He was unfamiliar with the man. So why did he know his name?

When Saitou examined him closer, he saw that the man held a metal pipe. An ominous feeling came over him.

“I found it. The bounty worth 10,000,000.”

“Eh?”

.....*What did he say just now?*

Saitou frowned deeply. “Bounty?”

“You’re listed on that undergroundjobs site. Said I’d get 10,000,000 yen if I catch you.”

“.....Haa!?”

Undergroundjobs, site, 10,000,000. This came out of nowhere. What was

going on?

Saitou instantly became sober. *What's the meaning of this? I don't recall having a bounty put on my head.Could it be Murder Inc's doing? No, it can't be.*

The man sidled up closer to the dumbfounded Saitou, and Saitou took steps back. "Wai-wait. Please hold on-"

"Prepare yourself."

The next moment, the man threw up his metal pipe and came at him.

"Heee!"

Saitou yelled and quickly dashed off.

What is this? What's going on?



Banba came back to the office thirty minutes after his call with Lin. Lin expected him to have brought Enokida in with him, but Banba came back alone.

“Where’s the mushroom?” Lin asked.

“We went off somewhere.” Banba shrugged. “Seemed like he got some sort of plan.”

“A plan.....”

Lin knew full well how sharp that man was. However, no matter how skilled Enokida was, he was just a powerless hacker. If he got attacked by bounty hunters or hitmen, he would be at a huge disadvantage. He would be forced into submission. He could not physically fight with hacking or use a computer as a weapon.

“Looks like he couldn’t delete the post.” Lin glanced over to his own computer set up in the office. The post regarding Enokida was still on the undergroundjobs site page. Lin thought that man would have easily been able to get on the server and delete it with his abilities.

“Seems like he can’t. When he did, another one would be made with his location on it.”

Banba explained everything that had happened from beginning to end.

Lin more or less understood. The enemy’s objective was to rob Enokida’s means of hacking. Once they cut him from the network and took away his means of offense, he would be vulnerable.

And in the end, it had an effect. Lin looked at the post. The information on Enokida’s position would update after a few seconds, but then it stopped. This indicated that Enokida had stayed still in one place. That or he tossed away his laptop.

“.....What is that mushroom’s doing?”

Just as Lin tilted his head, pondering to himself, he got an incoming call.

He immediately hit the button to accept. “Hello?”

‘Do you know where Enokida-san is?!’

This voice was Saitou’s.

“What’s with the sudden call?” Lin grimaced. “You’re not even going to give me a proper greeting?”

He only got Saitou’s worked up yell. ‘I need Enokida-san for something, but he isn’t picking up!’

I don’t doubt that, Lin thought. He did not have the time to take a long phone call.

“He’s held up with something at the moment. I don’t think you’ll catch him anytime soon.”

‘N-no waaaay.....’ Saitou sounded like he was in tears.

“What’s wrong?”

‘I don’t really get it, but someone seemed to have made a post about me! Someone could get 10,000,000 for catching me-’

“Wha-,” Lin had an inkling. “Could it be he-.....”

He immediately turned back to face the computer and opened the to the top page of undergroundjobs. He began making a search under 10,000,000 on the forum.

He found one post.

‘I will pay 10,000,000 yen for the person who captures this man.’

‘Name: Saitou.’

‘Characteristics: Early twenties, slim, about 170 centimeters tall.’

‘Address: Haruyoshi 3-Chome Central Ward, Fukuoka City. Haruyoshi Corporated House room 403.

And Saitou’s photo was even posted on there. Saitou was most likely running away from the bounty hunters at the moment. Lin understood why he was so hasty now.

‘I thought I could ask Enokida-san to get rid of that post.....’

“That’s not possible,” Lin replied with a sigh. “Since that post is likely his doing.”

‘Ha?’

“Anyway, hide somewhere. You can hide in Shigematsu’s house. Just don’t go outside.”

‘I can’t!’ Saitou exclaimed. ‘I have work tomor-’

Lin dropped the call.

“What was that now?” Banba looked closely at his face. “Was that Saitou-kun?”

“That mushroom made Saitou a decoy.” Li turned the computer screen towards Banba. “Look at this. He put a bounty on Saitou twice the size of his.”

Enokida attempted to make the bounty hunters focus on Saitou instead of

him by making them a new target. That man was something else. “Is it normal to use your friends as bait?”

“Well, he must have thought about it. Although Enokida had betrayed his friends before, he has never abandoned them away.”

“That’s fine if that’s the case, I guess.” *This is what he meant by a plan?* Lin groaned. “He’s just doing things as it goes.”

Guess I should contact Shigematsu first. Just as Lin turned to look at his cell phone again, he noticed he got a message. This one was from Enokida.

“I got a message from the mushroom. ‘About that celebration party, I reserved us a spot at a restaurant next to the national highway. At 11 pm.’ A map with the restaurant marked on it was attached.

“Ah, I got one too.” Banba also opened up his cell phone. “‘Yamato was good at stealing bases during the last match at Gannosu.’ It says.”

Lin and Banba read each of their messages and tilted their heads in confusion.

“What the hell are these messages?”

“I wonder what these are.”

Enokida was not in the position to send these nonchalant messages while his life was being targeted. *What on earth is he thinking?* Lin only got more confused.

“What do you reckon’ he means by celebration party?”

“Don’t know,” the term did not ring any bells. “Did he send these to the wrong people?”

“No,” Banba shook his head. “Yamato-kun failed to steal bases this last game.”

Now that he mentioned it, Lin realized it was true. Enokida and Banba were the only two who succeeded in stealing a base during their game the other day.

“Then these messages are-”

“Yamato, steal, national highway, eleven.....” After Banba muttered to himself, he smirked. “I get it. So that’s it.”

“What do you mean?” Lin did not understand.

“Enokida-kun told me he’d contact me when he needs help.”

So what he meant by contact was sending an SOS message like this?

“.....So it’s a secret code?”

“Exactly.”

There had to be a reason for that man to make contact them in this roundabout way. Perhaps the enemy was intercepting his cell phone. So he devised these messages in a way for only them to figure out their true meaning.

“Ah, hello? Yamato-kun.” Banba had made a call right away. “I have a favor to ask of you to do.”

Bottom of the Sixth Inning

“A remote operated virus.....That’s blackleg for you. He’s really something.” Siva sounded impressed, but his expression looked annoyed. His usual smile was a little forced.

“He used his own malware and gave instructions from his cell phone.”

Blackleg infected his laptop with a virus during the power outage in the building. He left it in the restroom and got away from Nakasu Kawahashi Station. He then remotely controlled the device from a safe area, making it seem as if he was still in the station.

They never expected blackleg to use his equipment as a decoy. That was a risky battle plan.

“He probably intended to give himself more time. Well, it doesn’t really matter. It just means we can attack his cell phone then.”

Siva focused his attention on the screen again and started typing away on his keyboard with incredible speed.

“Please take a look at this.”

It seemed Siva easily got in. Blackleg’s cellular device log was displayed on one of the screens.

“Looks like he sent some messages. He sent them to various people.”

Chegar looked at the screen with him. Blackleg had indeed sent a few messages minutes apart.

‘Thank you for the present. I like it.’

‘I told you to treat me next time, right? I’d like to go out and have yakiniku.’

‘About that celebration party, I reserved us a spot at a restaurant next to the national highway. At 11 pm.’

‘Yamato was good at stealing bases during the last match at Gannosu.’

At first glance, they all looked like regular small talk, but there was a catch.

“.....Is it normal for someone to send messages like this in the situation he’s in?”

Perhaps it was a secret code made to look like small talk. Either that, or perhaps it was a scheme to unhinge them. Chegar needed to keep both in mind.

“First things first,” Chegar ordered Siva. “Get into any transaction information recorded on his cell phone and find out his back account. Pull out his card information and clean his used credit history.”

“Understood.”

Siva sat down in front of a different computer and worked swiftly. After a few minutes –

“Here it is. He purchased a shinkansen ticket on the internet several minutes ago. It’s heading for Tokyo.”

“He plans on leaving Fukuoka?”

“It’s scheduled to leave at 6:30 tomorrow morning.”

They had eight hours left before the train was scheduled for departure.

“Irasawa,” Chegar immediately called him. “Head to Hakata Station. He may appear there.”

‘Got it.’

After dropping the call, Chegar tilted his head, pondering to himself. “.....This

seems far too easy.”

Then maybe there was another catch. Was blackleg really planning on escaping on a shinkansen?

“Ah, here’s another one.” Siva raised his voice. There was an update on the credit history log. “He bought an airplane ticket for Busan.”

“Is this his true course of action?” Then they could just get on the same plane.

“I don’t know. This one could be a fake.”

Which way would blackleg plan on taking? The shinkansen or the airplane? Tokyo or Busan?

Or maybe his objective was something entirely different. Maybe he split their attention towards two options in an attempt to throw them off his trail.

If that was the case, then –

“Figure out blackleg’s whereabouts and capture him.”

They should not wait for him to make his move; they needed to move before he did and finish this.

“Where’s he currently at?”

Siva stopped typing. “I don’t know. Apparently he turned off his phone.”

“But you can at least find his activities until he turned it off, right?”

“I can’t. He’s using a smartphone case that blocks radiowaves.”

“.....A counter-measure against cracking, huh.”

If it completely shut out all calls, GPS, and faint magnetic waves, then there was no way they could track him.

Chegar then ordered their next move. “Attack the control system for the surveillance cameras in the city. We’ll find him with video footage.”

Chegar looked over the transaction history. Blackleg had purchased a couple of books a few minutes ago at a large bookstore that was open until late at night. The store was located in Imaizumi 1-Chome in the central ward. So blackleg should have been spotted by one of the cameras in the area there.

“I’m already doing that.”

Siva told him as he typed on the keys of another computer. He changed the page on the screen. What he brought up was a street in Tenjin. It was footage from one of the surveillance cameras set up in the city.

“I found him.”

A young male wearing a gaudy outfit and had a striking hairstyle was shown at one of the corners of the screen. He had silver mushroom-like hair. He wore a vibrant yellow parka and red skinny jeans. It was definitely blackleg.

“Alright, keep an eye on him. And continue checking his calls and messages on his smartphone and his log too, just in case.”

They used the surveillance camera footage to track where blackleg was going. Siva changed the screen often.

Blackleg kept walking amongst the crowd of people. He was on a street alongside the national highway. A young man bumped into him there. As they passed each other, the man bowed his head and looked like he said, “I’m sorry.”

“Where do you think he plans on going?”

“Don’t know.”

Blackleg kept changing places. He went to a late-night cafe, a rental video store, and a convenient store. He seemed to just be going around to places where there was public eye. It was probably so that he could not be attacked.

But that just meant they had to wait for the moment when he was all alone. “Guess we’ll be keeping watch on him for a while.”

Seventh Inning

Top of the Seventh Inning

After waiting at a coin parking lot in Tenjin, Yamato appeared. He seemed to have sneaked away from work as his hair was styled.

“I pickpocketed it as you asked.” Yamato handed over a wallet.

“You did good, Yamato-kun.”

Banba thanked him, but Yamato made a dubious look. “What’s the meaning behind this anyway?”

After being called up suddenly and be asked to pretend to be a stranger and steal Enokida’s wallet, naturally he was bewildered.

“Well, a lot happened, you see.” Banba spoke evasively. He had no time to fully explain everything.

Yamato, steal base, national highway, eleven – at eleven, have Yamato steal the wallet in front of the designated restaurant at the national highway. That was Enokida’s instruction. Banba had Yamato head over to the specified place right away. And sure enough, Enokida came by there.

Yamato was splendid. He had first walked down the street nonchalantly and casually approached Enokida from the opposite direction. He then made it look like he accidentally bumped into Enokida and pickpocketed his wallet. Yamato already had put the wallet in his pocket by the time he said “ah, I’m sorry,” in apology.

They immediately checked the contents inside the wallet. There were no bills inside. “Looks like he’s seen better days.” Yamato laughed, but Enokida most likely had taken his money out of it.

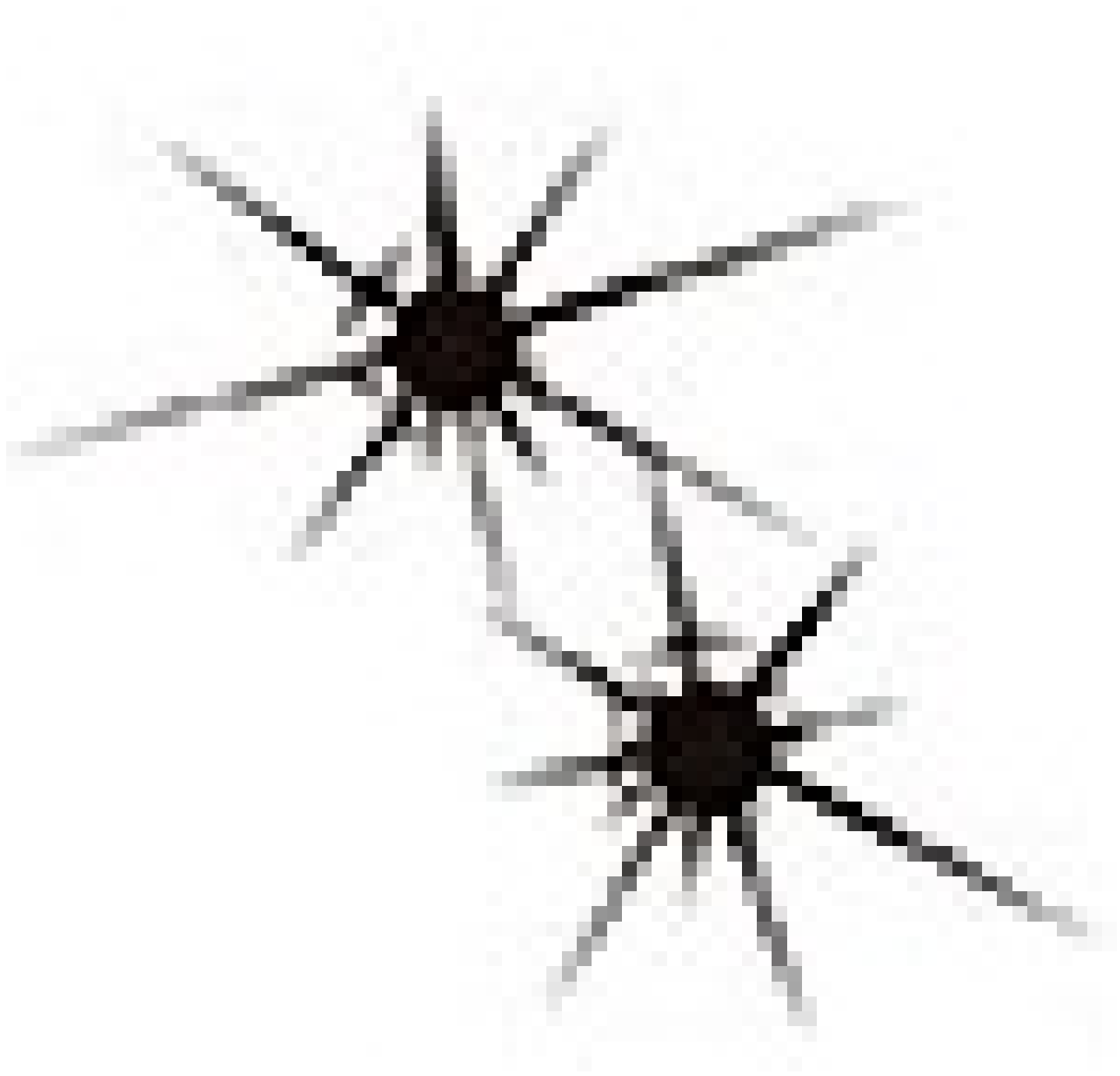
There was a piece of paper inside instead. A mass of text was written on the white folded sheet of paper. The beginning of the passage was labeled as ‘the script.’

“What does he mean by script?” Lin tilted his head in confusion. “Does the

mushroom plan on holding a play or something?”

Lin had no idea what Enokida was planning. However, it was Enokida. He should have a thorough plan made.

At any rate, they had no other option than to do as they were instructed.



Enokida chose places packed with people and made sure to not isolate himself at even given moment. It was better to be out in the open where others could see him than to try and avoid the public’s notice This way it would be hard for his enemies to take action. After Enokida wasted an hour visiting cafes, rental shops, and convenient stores, he then entered a family restaurant in Hirao. He only took drinks from the self-service drinking area.

He had handed over his instructions to his friends through Yamato. Banba and

Lin should be doing as he told them to by now. Now he just had to wait until they came. Enokida opened the paperback book he just purchased to kill some time.

Time passed moment by moment. Customers would come in and then leave. Enokida was on his third coffee by now. Before he knew it, more than thirty minutes had gone by since he came into the restaurant.

Enokida took a seat where he could watch the entrance to see who would come in. The door opened, bringing in new customers. Enokida looked up and glanced in that direction. They were two young women who looked like university students. It was unlikely they were assassins.

The next customer to come in was a short man. He was wearing a hood, so Enokida could not see his face. He was not an enemy either. Enokida turned back to the book in his hands.

Time slowly passed by. The area was quiet and tranquil. He did not sense anyone who would attack him here. There were many customers in the restaurant and the shop attendees wandered by regularly. Naturally under these circumstances, he could not be attacked.

Enokida turned on his smartphone. The current time was displayed on the screen. The date had changed some time ago. He should be getting a phone call from Banba soon. All he would have to do then was wait for his arrival and meet up with him.

Everything would go according to plan. Enokida smirked.

Bottom of the Seventh Inning

The last place blackleg went to was a twenty-four hour family restaurant. There were plenty of customers and the place was well-lit even in the dead of night.

Blackleg must intend to stay there for a long period of time. He seemed to have chosen to retreat to safe areas where he was kept under public eye instead of going into hiding.

“Is he trying to waste time here until his departure time arrives?” Siva

suggested.

“Probably.”

“This may be a tough battle. We’d better make sure we don’t make the wrong move and exhaust our resources.”

Chegar looked at the screen. On it was the footage from the surveillance cameras set up in the family restaurant. Blackleg was reading a book near the entrance at a window.

“He’s using his smartphone.”

Blackleg had taken out his cellular device, which he had turned off earlier and was protected by an interceptive case.

“He may be waiting for someone to call him.”

After they monitored it for a while, there was activity.

“He got an incoming call.”

As they expected, someone had called blackleg. Naturally they would listen in on the conversation.

‘Hi,’ blackleg answered the call.

‘Hello,’ they heard a man’s voice in reply. He must have been a friend. ‘It’s me.’

‘Yeah.’

‘I got everythin’ set up. A courier I know is gonna take you out on a freighter from Hakata airport.’

‘Thanks, you’re a big help.’

‘We’re gonna get you in an hour.’

‘Alright. I’ll be waiting.’

And the call ended there.

After blackleg dropped the call, he stood up from his seat and walked over to the restroom.

“So that’s his escape plan?”

He did not intend to escape via a shikansen or an airplane. He planned to escape by boat.

But there was one thing that bothered Chegar.

“.....Isn’t it strange?” Chegar cocked his head. “How did he make contact with his friend?”

They did not see any suspicious actions made by blackleg up until now. They did not see him contact anyone he would have known or called anyone. So when did he devise an escape plan?

.....Could it have been those messages after all?

Then was there a secret message encrypted in one of those messages that only his comrades could understand?

Chegar clicked his tongue. They should have been more vigilant.

Even as he realized this, there was no time for him to regret it.

“Should we look out for him at Hakata airport, then?”

“No,” Chegar shook his head at Siva’s suggestion. He thought over what they should do again.

Blackleg had purchased a ticket for an airplane and a shinkansen. And now there was the option of smuggling himself out of the country.

Which one was the real plan? Which route would he take to get out of Fukuoka?

Blackleg should be aware that he was being spied on. That would be why he had sent those messages in a roundabout way to convey their meaning. Then the airplane or the shinkansen was a decoy. But if he was aware they were listening in on their conversation, then the freighter they mentioned may also be a trap. There was also the possibility of all of these options being dummies that Chegar could not cross off either.

Any one of them could be a decisive blow. They could not move recklessly. And yet, blackleg’s greatest intention could be to cause them confusion and distract them.

They had a time limit of one hour until his comrade arrived to get him. During that time they had to do something between now and then.

Siva spoke up then.

“He has an hour until help arrives. Blackleg probably intends to just spend his time waiting in this restaurant while carelessly reading a book, right?”

“He hasn’t shown-” Chegar looked back to the screen. Blackleg was shown in the footage. He had apparently come back from the restroom. He was drinking a new refill of his carbonated drink, holding the straw in his mouth. It did not look like he planned on leaving from there. “I guess so.”

“Then shouldn’t we just infiltrate the family restaurant now?”

Chegar frowned at Siva’s suggestion. “Are you saying we should capture blackleg while he’s in the restaurant?”

“That’s exactly what I’m saying. We should get to him before his friends arrive.”

“And try to kidnap him in a place full of people?”

If they did that, someone would see them for certain. All the shop attendants and customers could serve as witnesses. It would leave a trail of their crimes there. “There’s too much of a risk doing it.”

“We just have to snatch him from the restaurant without anyone seeing it happen.”

“That’s impossible.”

“It is possible.”

Chegar frowned deeply at Siva’s declaration.

“There is one good method to accomplish it.” Siva began typing on his keyboard again. “We can get back at blackleg and use the same method as he did.”

“The same method?”

Siva gave him a slight smile when he asked. “We can make a power outage happen in the restaurant.”



Blackleg had successfully slipped out of Nakasu. Everything became dark abruptly, and before Irasawa knew it blackleg had vanished. He had been reckless. He never expected there to be a power outage.

But this time they were going to make their comeback.

Irasawa did as Chegar instructed him to and parked at the parking lot for the family restaurant and waited there.

‘Are you ready, Irasawa?’ He heard Chegar’s voice through the earphone in his right ear. The connection was good.

“Yeah,” Irasawa confirmed as he put on night vision goggles. “I’m ready to go at any time.”

He was prepared for infiltration. Apparently blackleg was in this family restaurant according to Chegar and Siva. Irasawa’s role was to seize the man.

‘Alright,’ Chegar ordered. ‘Siva, do it.’

‘Okay,’ Siva voiced next to Chegar. Siva must have started hacking as Irasawa heard the sound of typing.

A few seconds later, the lights in the restaurant instantaneously disappeared. In the same moment it happened, Irasawa rushed into the facility.

The interior was in abuzz. The customers were muttering among themselves, shocked from the sudden power outage. No one seemed to have noticed Irasawa’s presence.

Irasawa moved forward with the plan. He looked around the area, able to see his surroundings well thanks to his night vision equipment.

A man with mushroom-like hair was seated at a table near the entrance.

I found him. No mistake.

Irasawa sneakily drew close to the man. When he pinioned his target from behind, the man’s slim body immediately jolted. Irasawa promptly covered his mouth with a cloth. The man lashed out in resistance, but it was futile. There was too much of a difference in strength between them. A weak hacker like him could not break away from Irasawa’s hold.

Blackleg started to become docile after a few seconds. His limbs had gone limp and he lost consciousness from the inhaling the drug.

Irasawa picked up his listless body, carried the young male out of the restaurant and put him in the trunk of the car.

All this happened in just a minute or two. Irasawa’s heart was racing. He wanted to have a match. He wanted to hurry up and kill the man in the trunk. He was getting impatient. Unable to suppress his excitement, he started breathing heavily through his nostrils.

The call was still connected. Irasawa addressed the men on the other end. “I got him.”



Chegar held his breath as he watched the security camera footage of the restaurant's parking area. Siva was beside him, watching the screen too.

A few minutes after the blackout, Irasawa appeared on there, holding blackleg.

'I got him.' They heard Irasawa say. He sounded very excited.

"No one saw you, right?"

'No one.' Irasawa told him. 'It went without a hitch.'

The restaurant was still out of power. Irasawa got into the car and left the parking space.

The place was a success. All that was left for them to do was erase the footage with Irasawa in it. Siva was already working on it, so they were almost done.

"Alright, good work."

Chegar said, content.

“I don’t care what you do with him later, but don’t leave his body behind.”

‘I know.’

As soon as Irasawa said that, the call was dropped.

Once blackleg was killed and his body taken care of by the usual specialist, then this job would finally come to an end.

“.....We did it.” Chegar muttered and clenched his fists.

“We did.” Siva stopped typing and turned to him with a smile. “I have finished my end too.”

“Good. You did well.”

They outwitted blackleg. Chegar was in unusual high spirits at that fact.

Eighth & Ninth Innings

Top of the Eighth Inning

The appointed time had come, so Banba headed over to the family restaurant. He was supposed to meet up with Enokida here.

He parked at the parking lot and stepped inside the facility.

“Welcome.”

When he entered, he was greeted by a young female shop attendee.

“What is your name?”

“Ah, no, I’m just here to meet with someone.....” Banba told her as he looked around the inside of the restaurant.

Enokida should have been waiting for him, but Banba did not see him anywhere.

“.....Huh? He ain’t here.” Banba cocked his head and muttered to himself.
“Where did ya go, Enokida-kun?”

Enokida had never failed to meet up at a set time before.

Banba had a bad feeling about this. “.....It can’t be.”



It was impossible for Saitou to stay hidden forever. His job would start today. It was an important day for restarting his life.

Saitou slipped out of Shigematsu's house he had been holding up in and headed back to his apartment. In just a few hours, it would be sunrise. Saitou had to hurry home and get ready to go to work.

Plenty of time had passed, and there should be less people checking that post now. Even that man from earlier should have given up by now. Saitou returned to the apartment with that thought in his mind. But when he got there, a man was standing at the entrance.

"So you finally came back?"

It was the bounty hunter from the day before.

“Gyaa!” Saitou yelled in shock.

Saitou became lightheaded. He never expected the man would wait for him. He did not think he would be so persistent.

Saitou turned around and dashed off in a haste.

The man chased after him. “Hold it right there, you bastard!”

“Uwwaaa! H-help me!”

Saitou yelled as he ran through Nakasu desperately. But the man was hot on his tail no matter how far he ran.

Several minutes after running around, Saitou had reached his limit. He stopped in his tracks just as he cut through a narrow alleyway.

It was a dead end.

The concrete wall obstructed Saitou’s path of escape.

“S-someone, save me-” Saitou took out his cell phone with shaking hands. But it was too late. The man was closing in on him.

It was useless. Saitou had been driven into a corner. Tears welled up in his eyes.

“Now I’m gonna get that 100,000 yen.”

The man’s thick arms reached out and grasped Saitou’s head.

“Hee!”

Saitou resented Enokida as he cowered in fear. What ‘a hacker and informant is all you need?’ It was because of that hacker that he got into this mess.

This was a disaster.

The day for restarting his life was welcomed by danger.

Bottom of the Eighth Inning

A unique ring surrounded by a fenced wall was set up in the garage at Irasawa’s house. The wire netting circled around and reached all the wall to the ceiling, leaving no place to escape inside the ring.

Irasawa carried the small body over and place him down in the ring. The man had striking looking hair and looked frail. He was apparently some big shot hacker going by the name blackleg, but Irasawa could honestly care less. He was nothing more than prey to him.

“Hey, wake up.”

When Irasawa hit him on the cheek, the young male woke up. He glared at him with a weary expression.

“It’s time for the match.”

“.....The match?” He replied with a hoarse voice.

“Between you and me.”

The man stood up shakily and moved away from him. The drugs seemed to still be in effect as he was unsteady on his feet.

“Come on now. Come at me.” Irasawa provoked him. “I have the key. If you wanna get outta here, then try to kill me.”

The man clenched his fists fearfully while making distance from Irasawa. What the hell is that stance? Irasawa felt like laughing. He must not be well adapted for fighting. Irasawa could tell just from his posture.

Irasawa also took up his stance. He knew he was excited. His heart pounded hard, recalling the past.

A gong rang inside his head. The match began. Irasawa quickly closed the distance and punched man’s body.

“Ugh,” the man had groaned.

The young man staggered and collided into the fence. The metal net crunched from the force.

His opponent made a counterattack, going for a punch. He made a weak fist as though he had never fought before. It had no impact on Irasawa. It was so weak he barely felt it touch him.

Irasawa took a step forward, cornering him against the wall and showered him with attacks. He alternated between punching the man in the face and in

the torso.

“Gwah.....”

Lastily he gave him a punch into his side. The man lurched over unnaturally and collapsed to the floor. The inside of his mouth must have been cut as the man spat out blood. The man crouched over, holding his stomach and bearing with the pain.

“.....Doesn’t look like you’ll be much fun.” Irasawa muttered to his opponent who could not even make a practice swing at him in retaliation. The other man’s face contorted in pain, holding his stomach. The eyes Irasawa could see from under his long blond bangs were hollow. The other hacker Irasawa had fought earlier had more backbone than this hacker. The other man attempted to fight back. Even as he trembled in fear, he rushed at Irasawa.

But this man was no good to him. He was out of the question. Fighting a pathetically weak creature like him would just be a waste of time. Irasawa supposed he should just hurry up and kill him.

“Do you have any last words?” Irasawa looked down at the young male crawling on the ground and asked that.

The man opened his bloody lips. “.....Are you the one who killed those homeless men?”

It was a gentle and hoarse voice.

He knew of them? Irasawa was shocked but he admitted in honesty.

“I am.”

This man was going to be killed by him now anyway. There was no issue of him knowing that.

“Why did you kill them?”

“No reason in particular.” Irasawa just enjoyed tormenting and killing people.

“And why do you pull out their teeth? Are those your spoils?”

Irasawa’s eyes widened in surprise.

“.....Now that’s a shocker. You knew even that?”

“There’s nothing I don’t know.” The man gave him a bloody smirk.

If that was the case, then Irasawa definitely could not let him live.

The young man’s gaze looked outside the fence. “Those are the teeth of the guys you killed over there, right?”

There were small bottles set on the shelf he was looking at. The bottles had human teeth in them. All of them were pulled out from his victims.

“You’ll be lined up alongside the other ones soon too.”

“.....Haha, yeah, no thanks.”

How dare he laugh at me. This man always has to get the last say, even though he’s about to be killed.

Irasawa picked up the video camera he had secured on the fence and held it in his left hand. In his right hand, he held a survival knife. He got on top of the fallen man and raised the knife into the air as he gazed down at him.

“Die.”

It was then. A phone was ringing. Irasawa immediately stopped what he was about to do. A cellular device was going off in the other man’s pocket.

Irasawa seized the phone and hit the button to accept the call.

‘Hey, Enokida,’ a man spoke.

“Who’s this?”

‘.....’ When Irasawa said that, the man on the other end had fallen silent. After a few moments, he replied in a weary voice. ‘And who are you?’

“Are you this guy’s buddy?”

The other man had fallen silent again at Irasawa’s question before speaking again a few seconds later. He seemed to be carefully crafting his words. ‘I have business with the owner of this cell phone. Can you put him on?’

“No can do.” Irasawa glanced down at blackleg and smirked. “He’s going to die now.”

‘Wha-’ The other man was at a loss of words in shock.

“Don’t you dare interfere.”

Irasawa hung up and turned the device off just in case. Now the other could not find their location.

He tossed the device onto the floor and turned back to face blackleg. “Your friends won’t be coming to save you.”

“.....So it seems.”

“How unfortunate for you.” There was no escaping what was going to happen no matter how much he tried to act tough. “A hacker is just a puny weakling without their computer.”

Irasawa swung down the knife at the lean man once more.

Top of the Ninth Inning

Martinez decided to book a table at a restaurant as he got a sudden message saying, ‘I’d like to go out and have yakiniku.’ Yakiniku restaurants were popular even in Fukuoka, and with not many tables there he had to make a reservation.

But even then, he had no idea what day or time he should book it. He needed to verify when would be a good time to go best for Enokida’s schedule, so he decided to call him right away.

“.....He’s not picking up.” Martinez frowned. “What’s up with him?”

After a few moments, he finally picked up.

“Hey, Enokida.”

‘Who’s this?’

But the voice Martinez heard was not Enokida’s.

He asked back in a low voice. “.....and who are you?”

‘Are you this guy’s buddy?’

Martinez fell silent for a few moments. Who was this man? Was he an enemy or a friend? Why did he pick up Enokida’s phone? Martinez had a lot of questions he wanted to ask, but first he had to find out Enokida’s condition. “I have business with the owner of this cell phone. Can you put him on?”

‘No can do.’ The man laughed. ‘He’s going to die now.’

“Wha-”

‘Don’t you dare interfere.’

And he hung up.

Martinez immediately called back, only to receive an automated message. ‘The phone number you are trying to reach is currently-’

The man had turned off Enokida’s phone.

‘He’s going to die now,’ he said? Him as in Enokida? Was he captured by an enemy? There’s no way.

Sweat formed on Martinez’s brow.

“Shit,” Martinez tutted and yelled. “What did you screw up on? You idiot!”

Bottom of the Ninth Inning

Chegar got a message from Irasawa later in the afternoon that day. His cell phone went off just as he was about to take a nap in the dreary room of his apartment. A video file was attached to the message. When he downloaded it, he saw it was that horrible video of his hobbies again. The young man with mushroom hair was in the recorded footage. It was blackleg.

Irasawa was punching him numerous times. The lean man would fall down each time he was hit. Irasawa mercilessly gave him another blow as the man shakily stood up. The man at last stopped moving and dropped to the ground. He was at death’s door. Irasawa held the camera in his left hand as always. The young man’s face was clearly visible on the screen, aside from his eyes that were covered by his long bangs.

Chegar could see Irasawa’s arm at the edge of the screen. He held a knife in his right hand and swung it down, slashing the man in the chest and stomach. Blood spurt out, dying the man’s yellow parka in red.

Chegar paused the video in the middle of it.

“.....I told him not to send them to me.” That man had terrible tastes as always.

But regardless, this meant Irasawa had finished the job.

Blackleg was dead.

“Blackleg, huh.....”

Chegar whispered to himself in the silent room. It finally sunk in after watching Irasawa’s video. They finally did it. Blackleg was dead. He won against the infamous hacker.

Chegar did not prefer working as a spy. But that said, even as he fell behind in knowledge and ability, he had managed to outwit someone above him. And that truth alone made him feel proud right now.

One more talented hacker had left this world. Chegar found it regrettable, but there was no help in it. They had to erase anyone who they could not win over onto their side. That was .mmm’s, no, our national policy.

Chegar only relished in the memory of victory for a few moments before moving on to work on the post-procedures. He first had to send payment over to Siva. He would pay him with cryptocurrency and in great amount this time.

Then all he had left to do was to report to an executive from the organization. Chegar contacted that man and headed to Hakata Station.

GAME SET...?

Highlights

Chegar sat down on the usual bench at the plaza in front of Hakata Station, but the executive did not show up. More than fifteen minutes had passed since the time they were supposed to meet up.

Did some unexpected situation happen? Just when Chegar began to think that to himself nervously-

“Hey there.”

He heard the voice of a young man. Chegar looked over to the man who called out to him and widened his eyes in shock.

“Y-you’re-!”

Who he saw was a man with blinding bright hair – blackleg.

“Stop.”

Blackleg held up a hand in gesture to stop Chegar from standing up hastily.

“I wouldn’t attempt doing anything,” he instructed Chegar as he took a seat next to him. “All the passerby here would become witnesses. Even that cleaner over there and that salaryman-looking guy too. You don’t want to do anything to make them notice us, right?” Blackleg smiled at him.

Chegar’s face contorted in annoyance, but he did as told. He then asked in a forced tone. “.....Why are you alive?”

“Because I didn’t die.”

‘Didn’t die?’

No, there’s no way he couldn’t have. He did die. He was killed by Irasawa. He even sent me the video as proof. I saw that with my own eyes. So how is he-?

“.....What happened to Irasawa?”

“Irasawa?”

Chegar suddenly realized that he unintentionally said his name. He was careless.

“Ohh, that ex-boxer guy, right?”

Chegar’s eyes widened.

This man knows everything?

“The video that was sent to you was fake. The real one is right here.”

Blackleg took out his tablet and showed it to Chegar. The footage was playing on the large screen. The location was at Irasawa’s house, and it showed the ring in his garage. Blackleg stood facing Irasawa in the fenced off area. He was being beaten up in succession in the face and torso.

‘Your friends won’t be coming to save you.’

‘.....So it seems.’

‘How unfortunate for you. A hacker is just a puny weakling without their computer.’ Irasawa swung down the knife. ‘Die.’

This was the exact same footage from the video he got from Irasawa earlier.

However, after this point was different.

‘Likewise, you’re in bad luck.’

Blackleg suddenly spoke up. The tone in his voice had changed too.

‘I’m not a hacker.’

The man then pulled out a weapon and stabbed it in Irasawa’s side.

In the center of the screen, Chegar saw Irasawa seething in pain.

In that moment, the situation did a complete 180.

Blackleg stopped the video there. “See? I didn’t die.”

The person Chegar saw in the video was without a doubt blackleg. The man had blond hair and wore a yellow parka and red skinny jeans. He looked exactly the same as him, but it was a different person. There was no way a mere hacker could beat Irasawa. “Who was that man?”

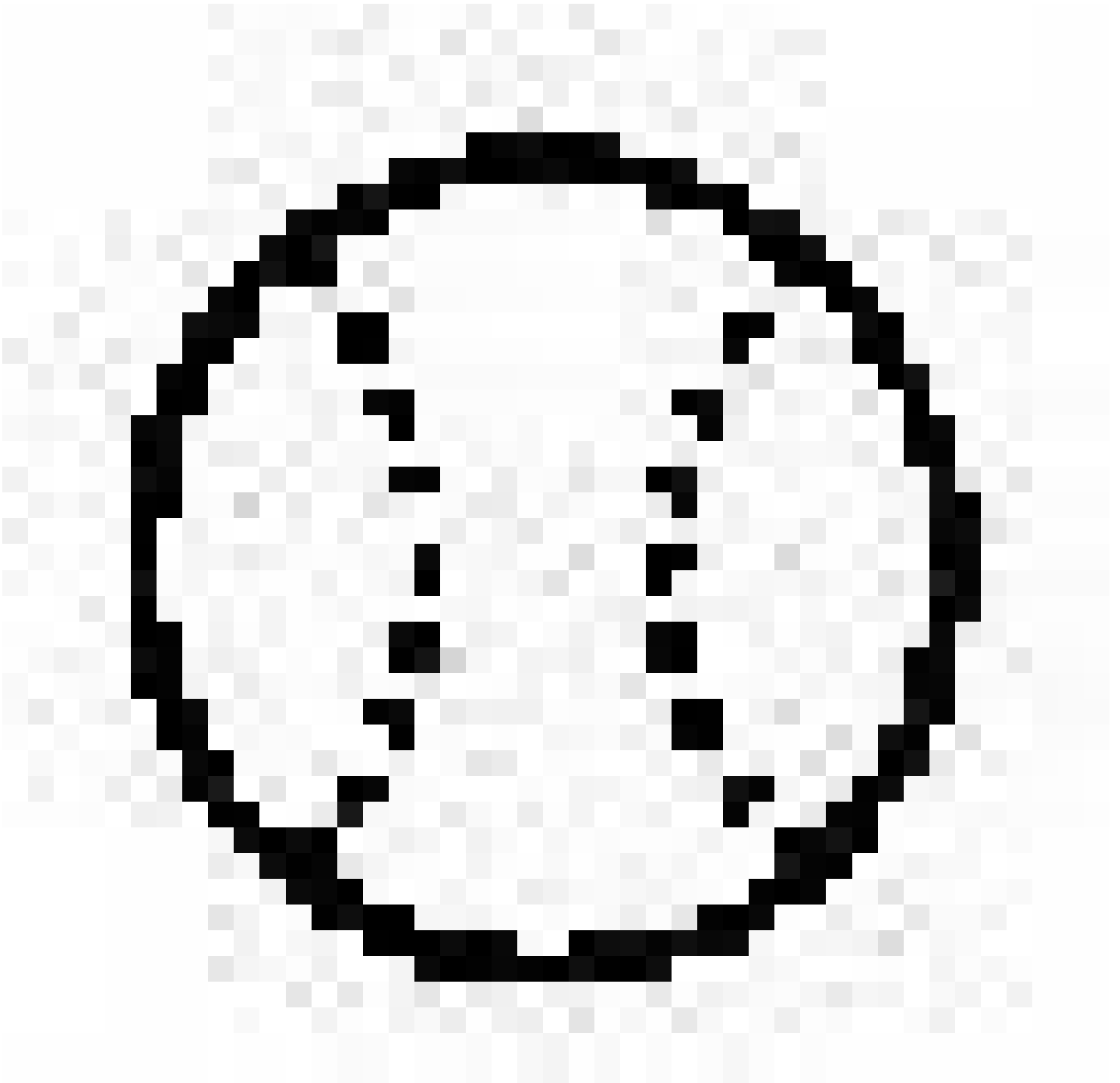
“A hitman I know.”

“A hitman, you say?”

“He happened to be *just about the same height as me*, so I had him take my place.”

“.....How was this possible?” Chegar frowned and questioned him. “When exactly did you manage to switch places?”

Blackleg had a smirk etched on his face. “It’ll be a long story to tell to explain everything.”



Top of the Sixth Inning

‘Script’

Lin: (Changes into something which he could cover his head and heads to a

family restaurant in Hirao. He then waits there for a while.)

Banba: (Calls Enokida after that)

Enokida: 'Hi.'

Banba: 'Hello, it's me.'

Banba: 'A courier I know is going to take you out of here on a freighter from Hakata airport.'

Enokida: 'Thanks, you're a big help.'

Banba: 'We're gonna get you in an hour.'

Enokida: 'Alright. I'll be waiting.'

Enokida: (Hangs up and heads to the restroom in the family restaurant)

Lin: (Heads to the restroom after some time has passed)

Enokida & Lin: (Change and exchange each others' outfits. Goes back to the other's seat)

Banba: (Heads to the family restaurant and meets up with Enokida)

That was what was written on the piece of paper they found in the wallet Yamato snatched.

"What does he mean by script?" Lin tilted his head after he read through it once. "Does the mushroom plan on holding a play or something?"

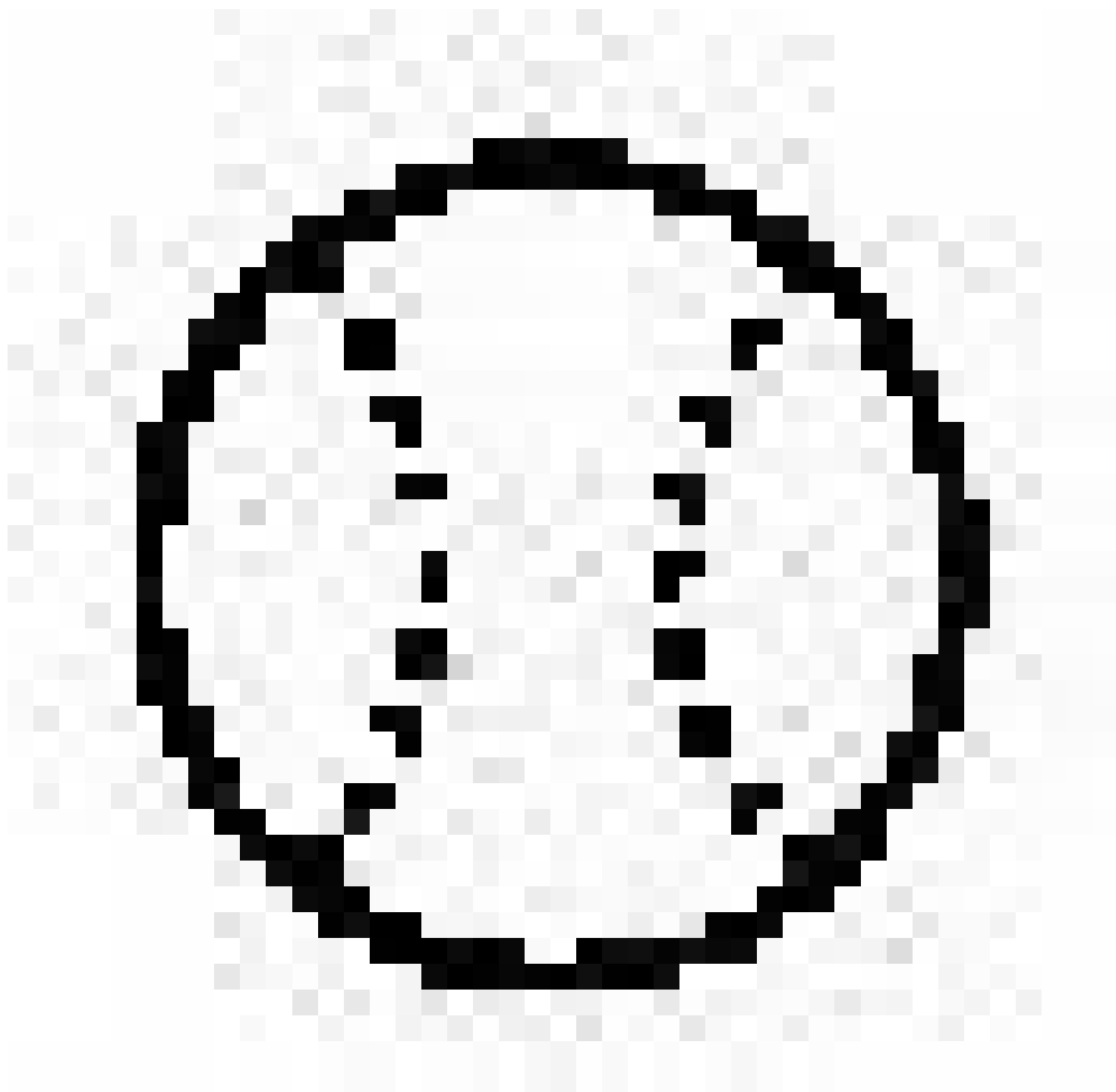
By script, it meant that these were Enokida's instructions for them to follow. It seemed like they would have Lin and Enokida switch places.

Lin grimaced. "Is he trying to make me a decoy this time?"

Although it would be better for a hitman like him to be captured instead of the hacker Enokida.

"Hmmm....." Banba made a small grunt while reading over the script. He seemed displeased. "This better go well."

They had no choice but to make it go smoothly. Lin did the first step as instructed and then headed over to the family restaurant.



Top of Seventh Inning

‘We’re gonna get you in an hour.’

“Alright. I’ll be waiting.”

After Enokida had finished the conversation with Banba as per his script, he stood up from his seat and headed to the restroom located at the corner of the restaurant. The men’s room was unoccupied.

After he got in and waited for a few minutes, he heard a harsh knock on the door.

“Hey, open up.” It was Lin.

Enokida opened the door and let him inside. The room was small, but it was

not so much so that it was difficult for two men of small build to not fit inside.

Lin was not in his usual crossdressing outfit. He wore jeans and a parka with the hood up.

“Well then, let’s get started.”

Enokida and Lin began to undress and exchanged their clothes and shoes.

“There’s not enough room. Move over a bit.”

“I can’t.”

“It’s hard for me to change.”

Lin put on the clothes Enokida wore as they bickered and Enokida covered his head with the hood thoroughly to hid his unique hair style.

“The size seems to be just perfect on you.”

Now that Lin had put on Enokida’s red skinny jeans and parka, Enokida handed him a paper bag. In it was a wig. “Here, put this on.”

“When did you have something like that on-hand?”

“I got it from Jiro-san. I never expected it’d help me out like this.”

Lin used a hair net to pull back his long hair and put on the wig. He made sure it was firmly in place so it would not slide off. The Enokida disguised Xianming Lin was now complete.

“This is good.” Enokida nodded, satisfied. “We’re like two peas in a pod.”

“I’m not very happy about that.” Lin objected. “Besides, do you really think this will fool them?”

“Those high-tech guys fall for the most traditional methods.”

His appearance was very unique, so it would be easy to pose as him.

“They only know of me by my trademarks. Blond hair, mushroom bob, yellow top and red pants. They should be looking for me based off of those characteristics, so they’ll be completely fooled by this.”

Enokida knew what the enemy would do to him based off Lin’s description. They probably planned to have him meet the same fate as macro-hard. They

would kidnap the hacker and kill him off. But the enemy would let their guard down. They would see him as nothing more than a frail hacker. So they just had to use that to their advantage. They would never expect the man they capture would be a hitman.

“Here, take this.” Enokida gave Lin his belongings and a redback spider transmitter. “This will track you, so make sure it remains on your person.”

“Got it.”

After Lin tidied himself up in front of the mirror, he grabbed the doorknob. “Alright then, I’m heading out.”

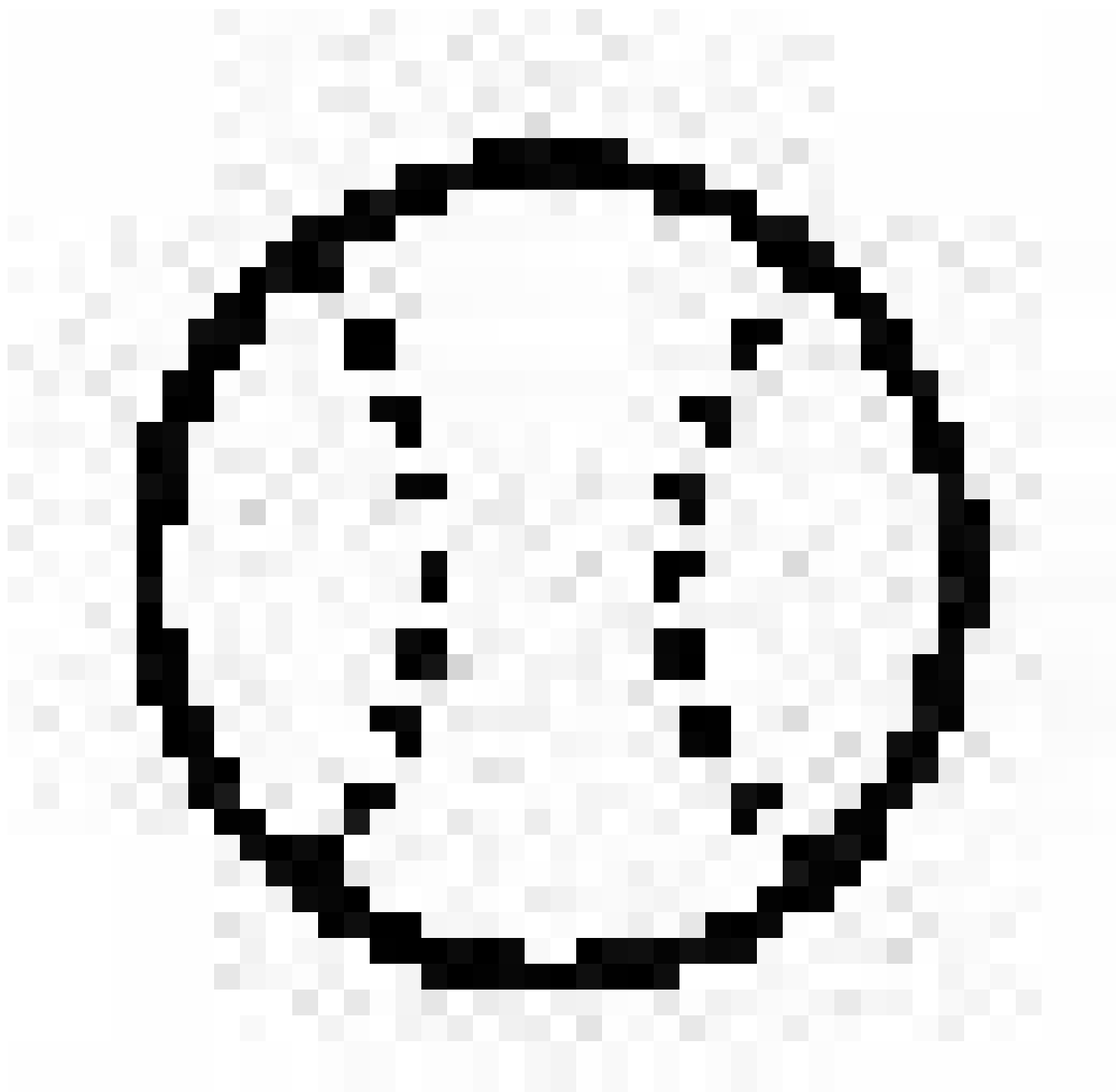
If they stayed in here too long, the enemy would be suspicious.

“Be careful,” Enokida lifted up one hand, palm facing Lin. “Put up a good fight.”

Lin high-fived him. “Leave it to me.”

After Enokida watched Lin head back to his spot, he also sat down at Lin’s seat.

The power outage occurred twenty minutes later. By the time the lights came back on, Lin was nowhere to be seen.



“.....It can’t be.”

Banba muttered to himself while looking around the family restaurant. Where was that man?

Unable to find Enokida, Banba was just about to become worried when he heard a voice from farther in the restaurant. “Banba-san. Over here.”

When he looked closer, he saw a young man wearing a hoodie waving at him.

“Oh, so you was over there?” Banba made a wry smile as Enokida stood up from his seat and walked over to him. “You was wearin’ a different outfit than usual, so I couldn’t tell.”

Enokida, having changed into Lin’s clothes, had his trademark mushroom hair

kept well-hidden underneath the hoodie.

“So how’s the plan goin’?”

Enokida replied in his usual cheerful tone. “It’s going smoothly and just as I expected.”

“So where’s Lin-chan?”

“Right now, I assume he’s in the enemy’s hands right now.”

Enokida knew how they operated based off of Kuroiwa’s hidden camera footage. They put their target to sleep and kidnap them. They probably have a hideout where they could safely kill people. Lin pretended to fall asleep and let himself be caught on purpose. Since he had a wiretap and transmitter device on him, Enokida was able to listen in on any conversations happening in the area Lin was at. All he would have to do was head over to wherever Lin was taken and save him.

“We should hurry over there too.”

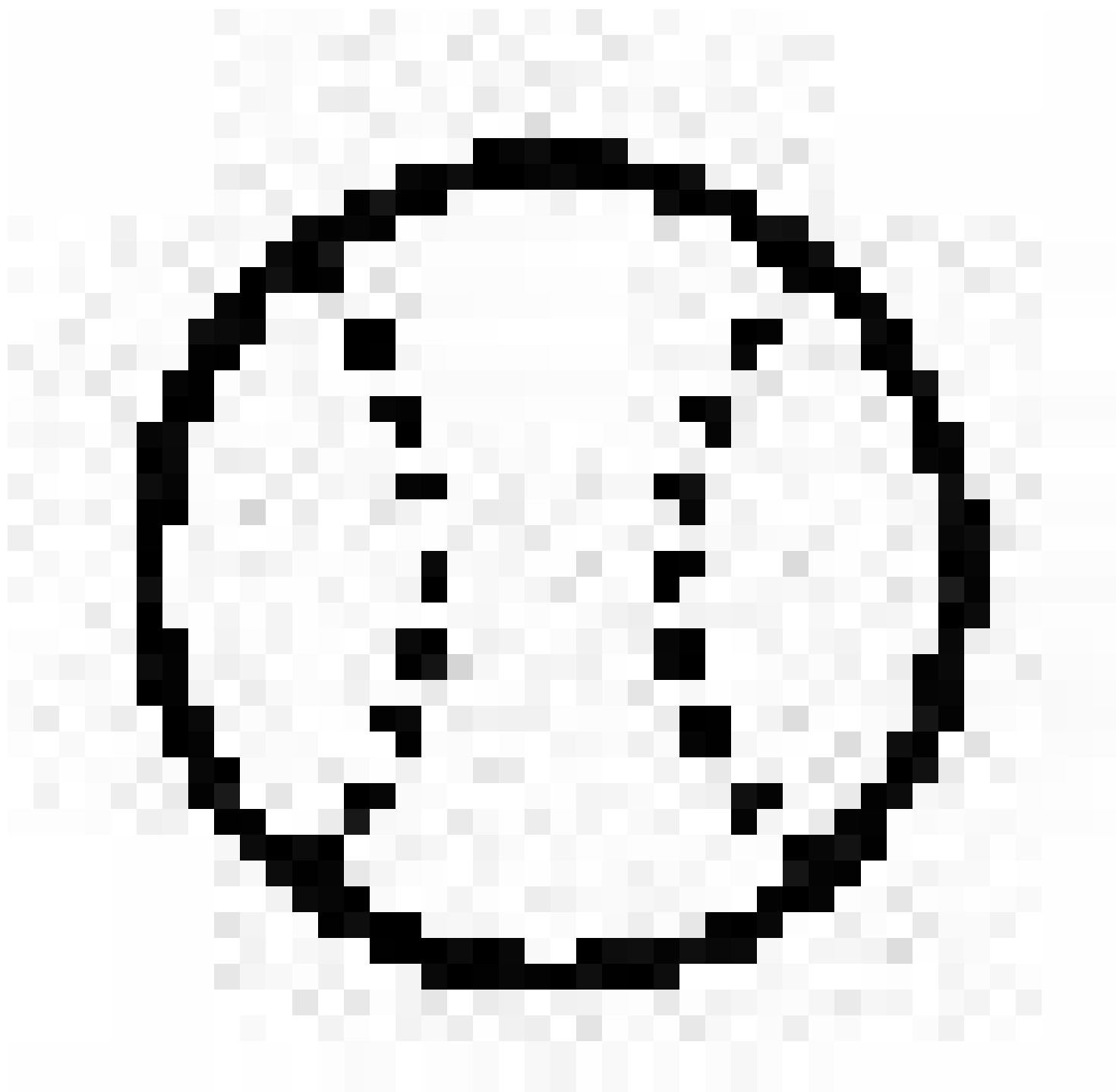
Just as Enokida paid the bill and was leaving the restaurant, he recalled something. “Ah, I completely forgot.”

“Hm?”

“I left Saitou-kun as a decoy still.”

“That ain’t good.”

Saitou still had a bounty on his head. He must be frightened somewhere right now. Enokida borrowed Banba’s cell phone. “Hello, Yagi? I have a little favor to ask you.”



Saitou ran, crazed to death. He desperately attempted to get away from his pursuer, but unfortunately for him he had come to a dead end.

He thought that was the end for him. He had been driven into a corner. He had been in numerous dangerous situations before, but this time he was out of luck.

Just as he thought that, however-

“Guwah.”

He suddenly heard a yelp. It was the large man’s voice.

What happened? Saitou looked at the scene.

A slim, elderly man had appeared abruptly. The man was dressed like a butler

employed at some estate somewhere. He grabbed hold of the brute's arm and made a swift hit to the back of the man's head. The brute fell unconscious and collapsed on the spot.

Who on earth is this old man? Saitou stared in shock.

The man gave him a pleasant smile.

"I presume you are sir Saitou, correct? I have been looking for you."

Saitou was even more surprised. *Why does he know my name? He said he was looking for me. Then is he also a bounty hunter that wants my bounty?*

Saitou had turned more pale, but the man ignored that and bowed deeply to him. "I am greatly sorry for the trouble the young master has imposed upon you."

".....You-young master?"

Saitou tilted his head, mouth wide open in confusion. *What on earth is going on?*

"I am truly grateful for you being friends with and taking care of the young master. Here is a gift out of my appreciation. Use it however you please." The man took out a bills from his pocket. The thickness of the stack easily looked like it was roughly 1,000,000 yen.

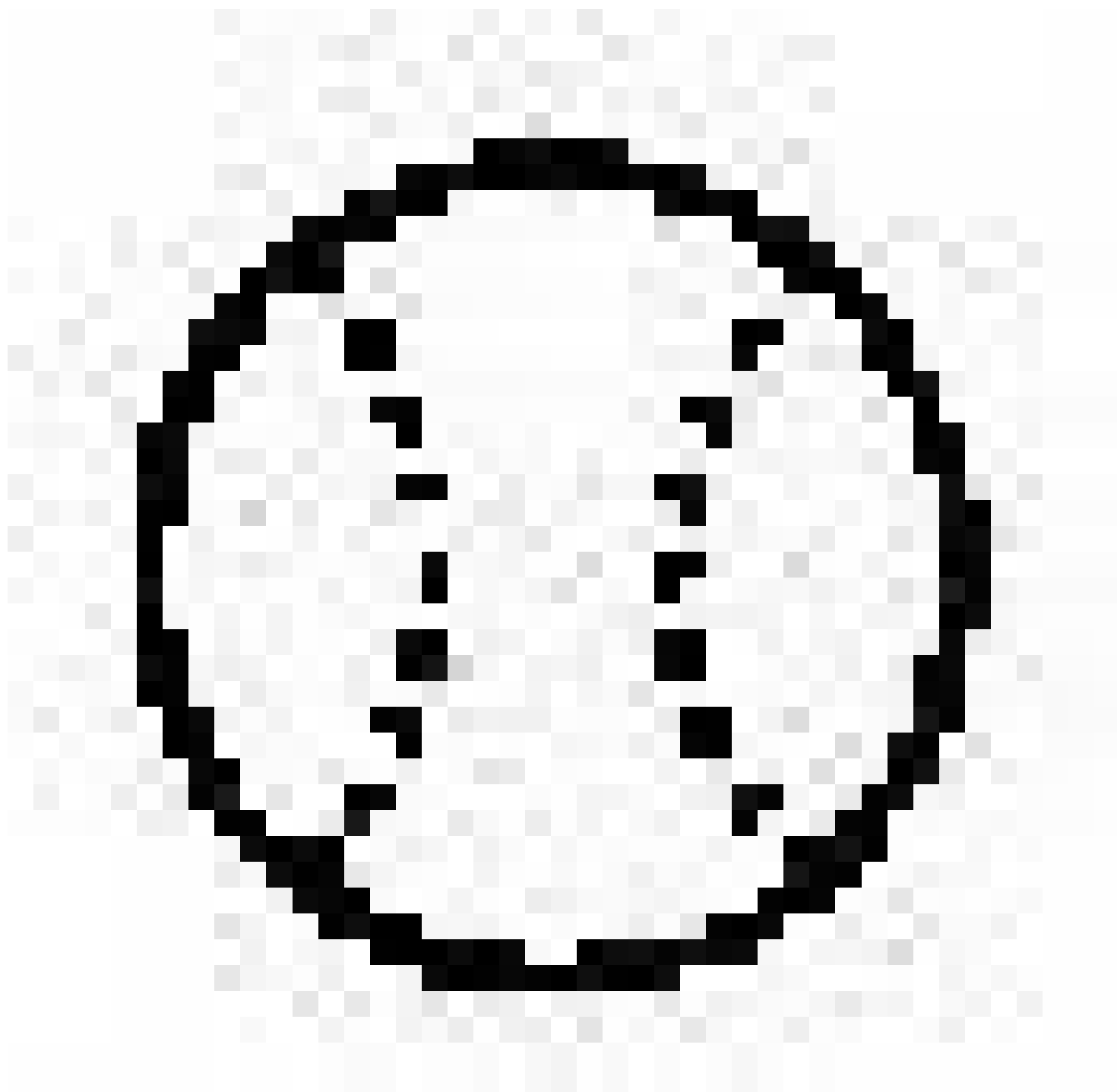
"Here, take this as well." The elderly man also handed him *umegae mochi*. "This is a souvenir I purchased when I visited Dazaifu the previous day."

"A-alright.....Thank you....."

Saitou decided to accept the gifts.

So.....who is this young master, again?

The elderly gentleman gave the bewildered Saitou a courteous smile.



“Your friends won’t be coming to save you.”

“.....So it seems.”

“How unfortunate for you. A hacker is just a puny weakling without their computer.”

In front of him, the man was about to swing down his knife.

“Likewise, you’re in bad luck.” Lin immediately took action. “I’m not a hacker.”

He struck the man into his side with his hidden weapon.

“Ah-gah.”

The man jumped back, shocked by the pain. Lin immediately stood up and took up his stance. He then looked around the area and muttered. "This stage sure brings back memories."

Lin recalled the past of when he was in an area surrounded by a fence. He had fighting practice in a similar place like this in the facility he grew up in.

"You only hit me ten times," Lin glared at his opponent from underneath the long silver bangs and stated. "Four times in my face, four times in my stomach, and two times in my back. So I'll have you receive double those."

Lin began his counter attack. He quickly closed the distance and sunk a fist into the unsteady man's upper body. "This is what you getting too high and mighty, you small fry."

Lin punched him in the face once he lost his balance. And then two. He continued punching the man in the face and body interchangeably. *Three hits, four hits*. All while counting in his head.

When Lin made his seventh hit, the man yelled wide-eyed. "Who-who the hell are you?!"

"A hitman."

"It can't be; you switched places with that punk?"

"You're slow on the update."

Lin sighed and sunk his fist into the man's left cheek.

Eight punches to the face, eight to the stomach, and four to the back. Once Lin weakened his enemy with continuous punches, he picked up the weapon in his right hand again. "Unlike you, I don't kill for fun. Since I'm a professional."

Lin had finished paying him back for the punches. Playtime was over. He first cut the tendon in the man's leg so he could not escape.

"Argh-," the man screamed and dropped to the ground unsightly. "Urghaaaa."

The man crawled on the ground, moving like a caterpillar. Lin took the key out of the man's clothes and locked the heavily wounded man inside the cage.

It was then. The side door to the garage suddenly opened. Two men entered.

It was Enokida and Banba. They had found out where he was from the information they got from the redback spider listening device and transmitter.

“.....Oh, you’re here already? That was fast.”

“Lookie here,” Banba glanced at the man in the fenced off area and shrugged. “Seems like he didn’t need to be saved.”

“So how was my imitation of him?” Lin grinned. “I had him spot on, right?”

He had said with pride. Banba turned to him with excited eyes, “you was super on point!”

“No, it wasn’t.” The person in question, however, made a deep frown in disapproval.

Lin then pointed at the man with his thumb, changing the topic. “So I left him unable to move.”

The plan had gone perfectly.

“All that’s left to do is make him tell us where his comrades are, right?”

“Couldn’t ya figure that out by looking into his contacts on his phone?”

“Haha.”

The man behind the fence suddenly laughed. He took out his smartphone from his pocket and tossed it onto the ground. “If you can do it, go ahead and try.”

“Well, that’s just fine. I’ll take a look.”

Lin went to open the door, however-

“Lin-kun, wait a second.”

Enokida stopped him.

“You shouldn’t just touch it without knowing what you’re doing. Based off how this man is behaving, I’d say he might have set it so it’d explode in an enemy’s hand.”

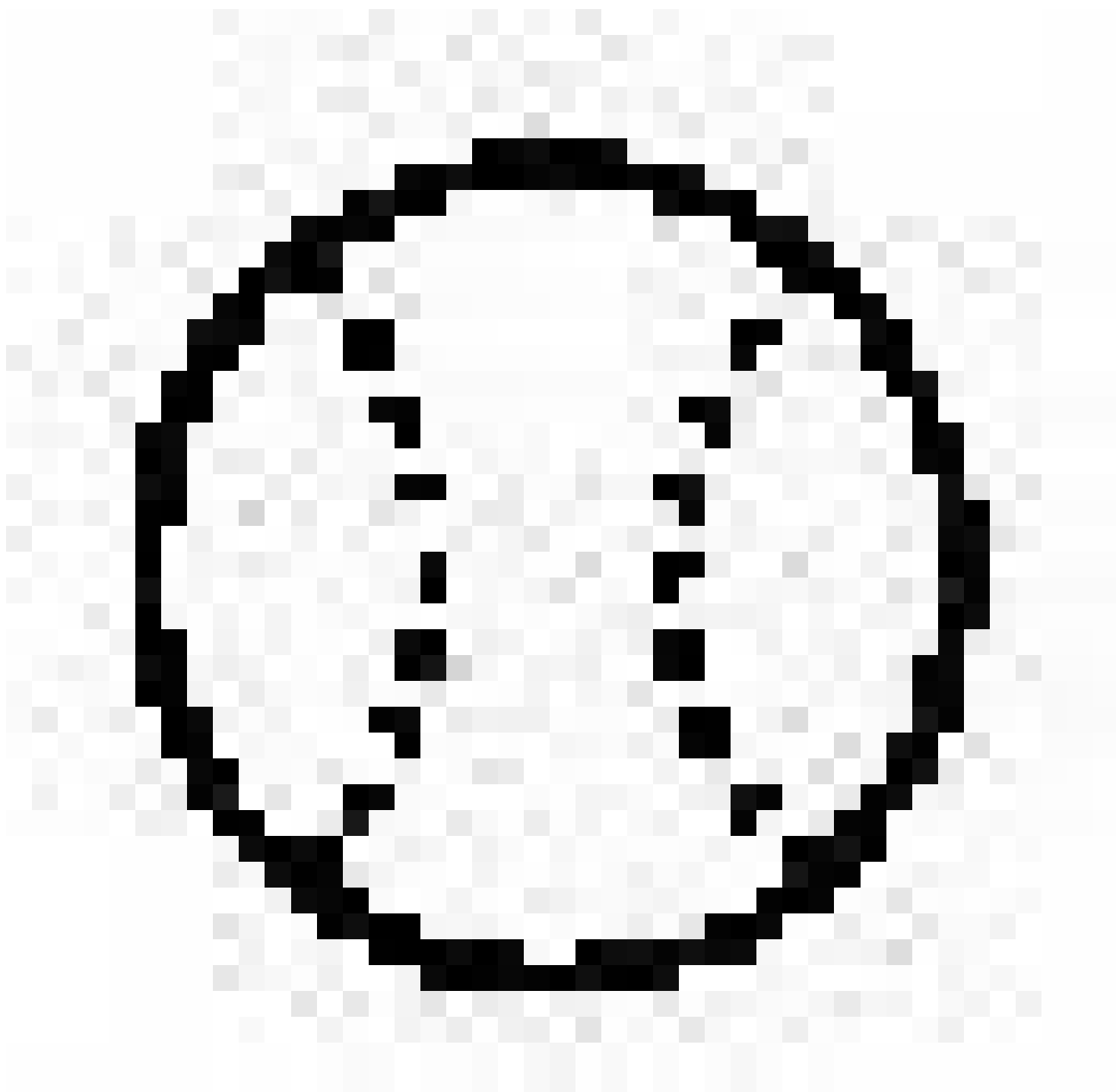
“It’d explode?” Lin turned his focus back onto the man. He made a slight smile on his face. “I see.”

“For him to hand it over purposefully means he has the confidence it can’t be hacked into.”

Enokida’s expression was calm. He was chuckling as though amused.

The man grimaced upon seeing that. “.....What’s so funny?”

“In times like this, it’s better to get that information out from a person instead of a machine.”



Martinez had laughed when Enokida had called him using Banba’s cell phone, “I was worried. I thought you’d been killed.” He was told, ‘come right away,’ and was given their current location.

Several minutes later, Martinez arrived at the garage. He looked around the

area, confused. "What's this room? Is this a fight club?"

"Sorry for having you come on such sudden notice."

"What the-," When Enokida spoke to him, Martinez's eyes widened in shock. "There's two Enokidas!?"

He stared closely at the two mushroom heads, Enokida and Lin.

".....Did you proliferate?"

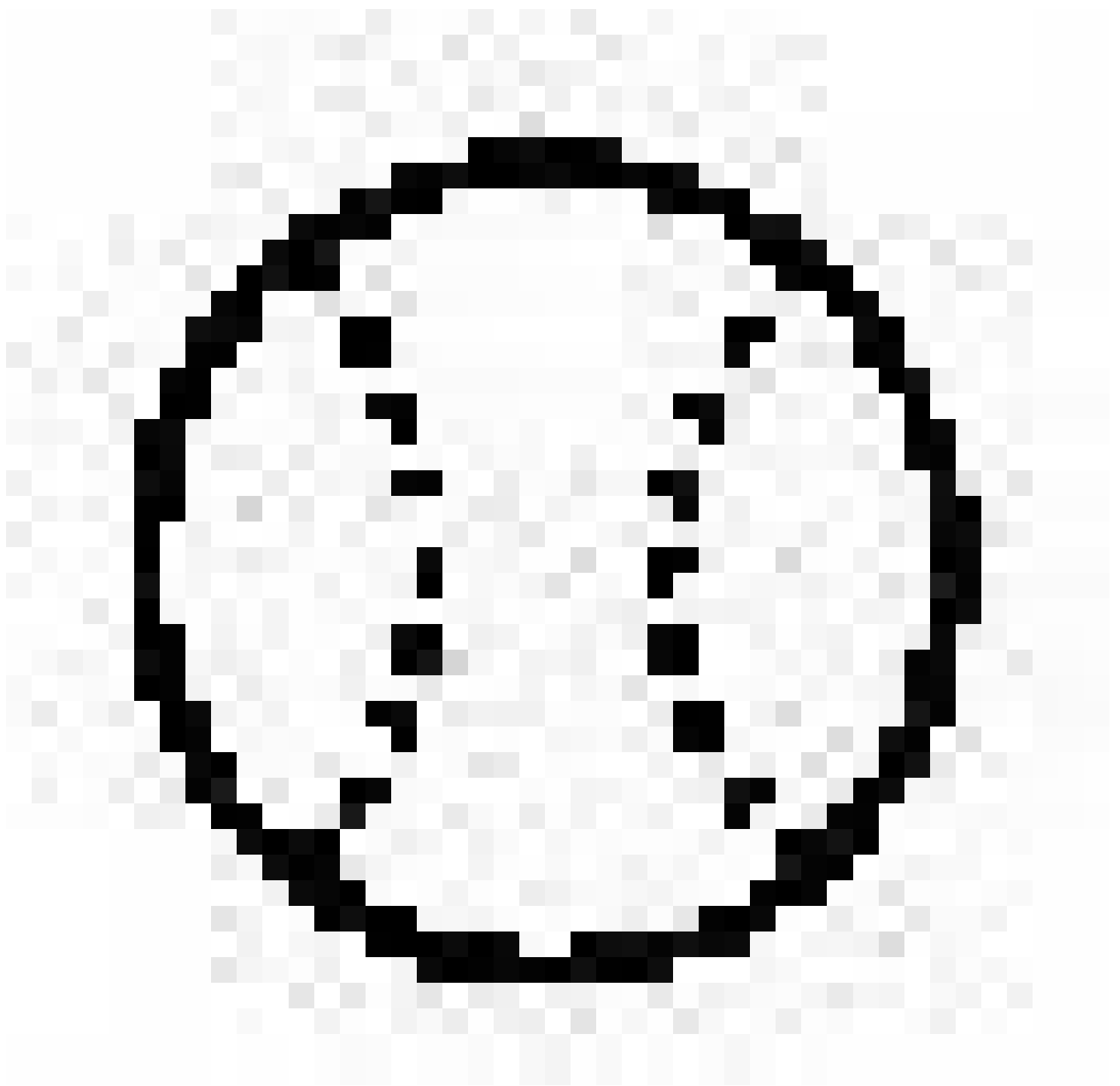
"I did not." Enokida objected with a small sigh. "Look closely; it's Lin-kun."

"What, so it's just Lin." Martinez's eyebrows then furrowed in confusion. "Why is Lin cosplaying as you?"

"He used me as a decoy."

Martinez understood once Lin had explained everything that happened. "Now I see."

"I got a job for you to do," Enokida looked over to the blond male. "I want you to make him tell us as much information as you can. Without killing him."



Five hours had passed since the torture began by the time they were called over to the warehouse used by the avengers as an execution site, at a corner in Hakozaiki. It was dawn, and the area was fully illuminated by now.

The man was sitting in a chair, his limbs bound in the center of the room. His head hung forward limply. He was injured everywhere as he was covered in blood head to toe. An exhausted looking Martinez stood next to him.

“Is he dead?”

“No, he’s still alive.” Martinez smiled bitterly. “He was rather sturdy. As expected of a former boxer. It was tough to get him to talk.”

“A boxer?”

“Yeah,” Martinez read off a note he had. He wrote down the information the man gave him. “His name is Irasawa. Ever since he beat someone to death in a match a few years back, he no longer could be in the ring.”

Irasawa then fell mentally ill and became addicted in killing people. Lin, Banba and Enokida listed to the information Martinez got out of the man.

“He seems to take videos of his kills as a form of tranquilizer in a sense. He calms himself down by watching them to suppress his urges to kill someone.”

“He’s a third rate hitman.” Lin pouted. “Who would hire a small fry like him?”

“He has two comrades. One is named Chegar. That may be an alias, but he’s his employer. I guess he’s a spy for some cyber terrorist organization.”

“Ah,” Enokida exclaimed. “He’s probably from .mmm.”

“The other is a freelance hitman. He’s called the Cracker.”

“Ah,” this time Banba was the one to raise his voice.

“Do you know him?”

“A little bit.”

According to the information Martinez got, the cell phone Irasawa used was developed by .mmm and was made to counter high class hacking. They used the organization’s mailing service, which was protected by a heavy firewall, to block interceptions of their calls. Hacking was made impossible. The server was monitored twenty-four-seven by an elite division, so they could easily catch any infiltrators. The only people who could receive and make phone calls was anyone working for them or anyone who had the same device. An external attacks or viruses would completely cause the device to shut down.

And if the password was wrong after three attempts, the device was set to explode into tiny pieces. However, that had no effect when the person was faced with a torturer.

“I got the password.” Martinez tossed over Irasawa’s cell phone to them. The lock was already solved.

Enokida searched through the device and found several video files.

“Take a look at this.”

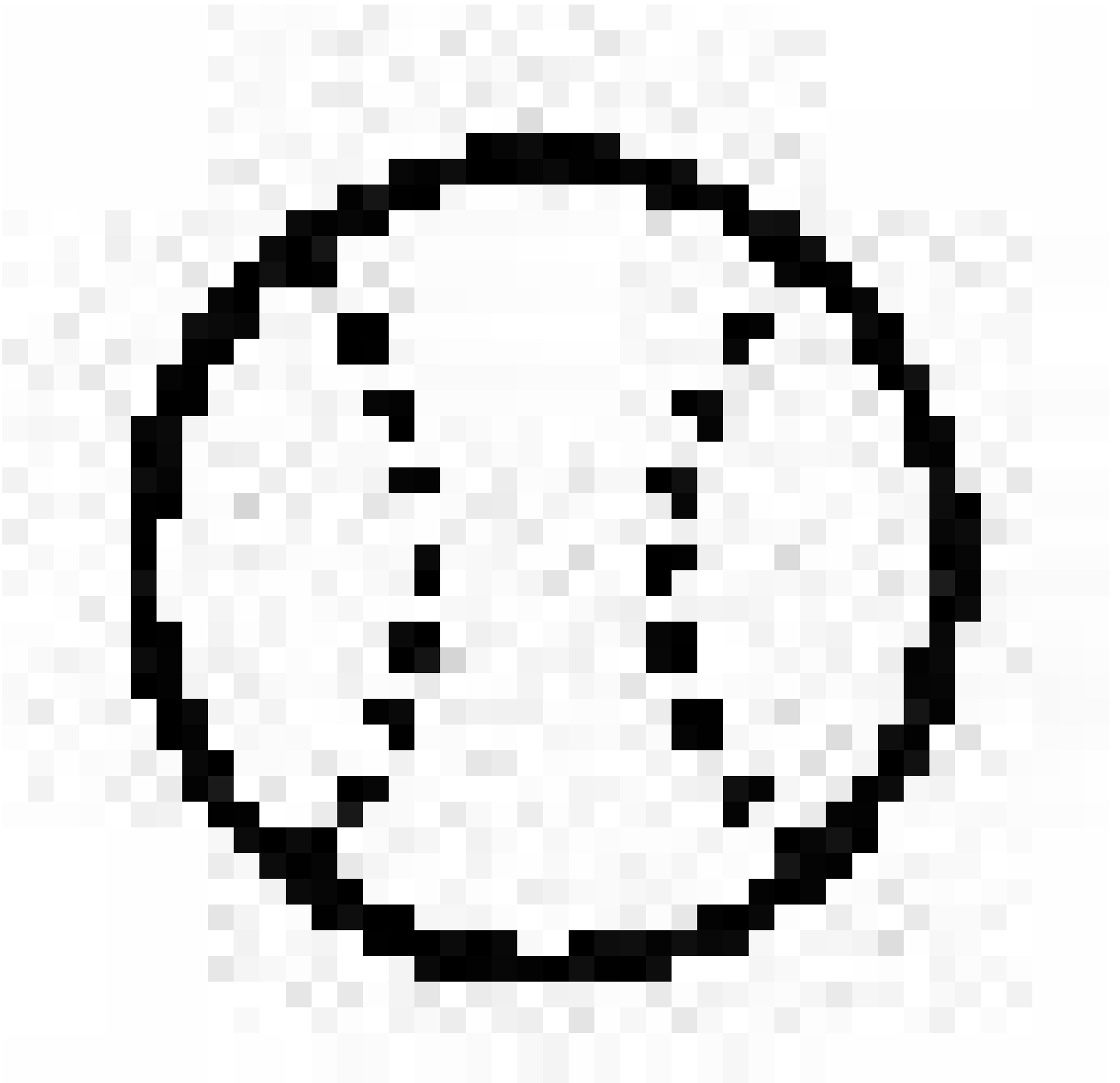
The footage was that of one of his murders. A slightly dirty looking man was being beaten up by Irasawa in the ring.

“So this guy was indeed behind those homeless killings.” Lin nodded.

Enokida searched through his message history. The man apparently sent the videos of the men he killed to someone. “Looks like he sent this message to his employer.”

“So what should we do next?”

Enokida grinned when Martinez asked. “I have an idea.”



“Geh.”

The man yelped when he saw Martinez's face. He was the person who uploaded the fake videos on a video sharing site – Shinji Taniyama. He made an openly displeased face seeing Martinez at his apartment again.

"You again?What have you come here for now?"

"Pardon me," Enokida slipped through the opening in the door and stepped inside the room.

"Hey, don't just walk in without my permission! Actually, who the hell are you?!"

"Sorry, excuse me."

Martinez also proceeded inside.

The barking of dogs could be heard resounding throughout the room. Four little dogs dashed around the small room, following their feet wherever they went.

Taniyama quickly yelled. "Shhh, quiet down. Or else the landlord will discover you!"

".....Is this a dog house?" Enokida inquired as he watched the creatures.

"Well, a lot went down." Martinez gave a bitter smile back.

Taniyama glared at the two of them. "Hey, I did as you said. I went and got them at the shelter."

The man seemed to have thought they came to check up on whether he kept the dogs or not. Martinez shook his head. "Ah, no. We're here for a different matter today."

"A different matter?"

"I would like to borrow your skill. I want you to make a video."

Taniyama's eyes widened at the unexpected proposal. "A video?"

"I need a video where it looks like I died." Enokida replied.

"We got to get filming right away, so we need that retractable knife and fake blood please."

“We’ll pay you for it of course,” Enokida added. “Enough to where you could live in a place with enough room for four dogs instead of this cheap and shabby apartment.”

“Haa.....Yeah, then that’s fine.” Taniyama did not understand the situation until this point but accepted the job regardless.

“Hey, Enokida.” Martinez was curious of something and asked him. “Why are you going so far as to make a video to fool them?”

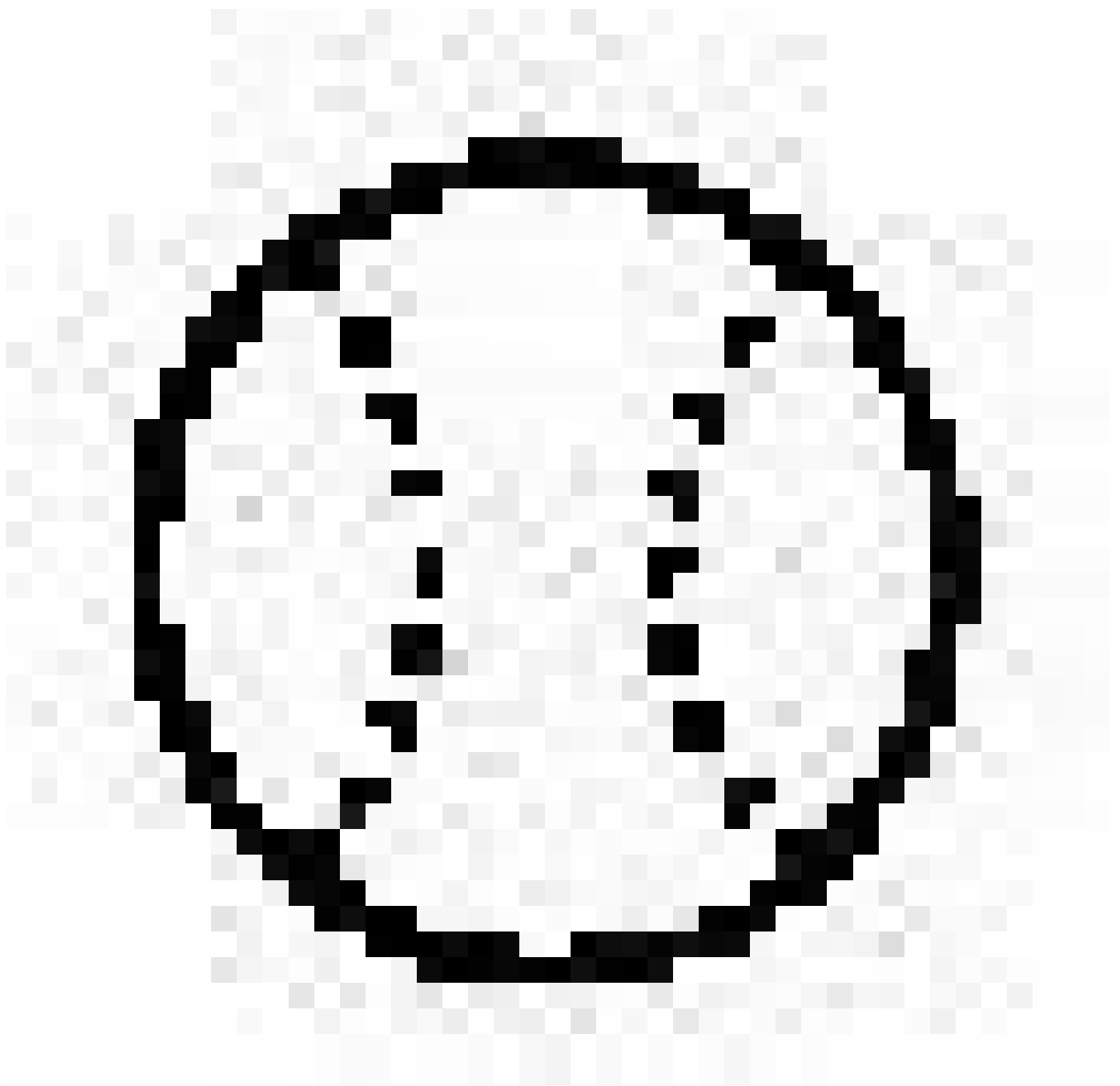
They could have used Irasawa as a hostage or pretend to be Irasawa to bring his comrades out of hiding. There were plenty of ways they could make contact with his friends. And yet, Enokida chose going through the hassle of making a video.

“They probably wouldn’t question downloading a file that was sent to them by their comrade, right?”

Martinez hummed in agreement. He finally understood what Enokida’s train of thought was. “So we’re going to put a virus on that file and send it to the enemy, right?”

Enokida nodded with a smile. “That and because it’s fun making a video.”

Martinez shrugged. *You just wanted to try it?*



Chegar was dumbfounded when blackleg told him the truth.

“So we edited the video to make it look like I had died.” Blackleg continued on with pride. “The moment you downloaded that video, all of your information fell into the palm of my hand.”

Chegar realized too late when he mentioned that. “.....Flammulina, huh.”

He recalled what Siva had told him about it earlier.

‘Blackleg made an automatic information disclosure virus called Flammulina. It was a virus he would attach to downloadable files that would infect the computer as soon as the videos and images were downloaded.’

Chegar never expected Flammulina to be embedded in the video file he

received from Irasawa's cell phone – the footage of his killing.

“Flammulina profliates. Just like a fungus, where its name derives from. The virus will infect everyone else you make contact with. I got a big haul out of all your comrades' data.”

He got me, Chegar bit into his lip. Even though he just realized it, now it was far too late to do anything about it.

Blackleg glanced over to the large clock on the Hakata Station building.

“Now then, I guess it's time for me to go. An acquaintance of mine is heading back to Tokyo soon, so I have to see him off.”

He said and stood up.

“My job is done here. The people from the public welfare and cyber divisions will be giving you a warm welcome now. The person you're waiting on is already one step ahead of you.”

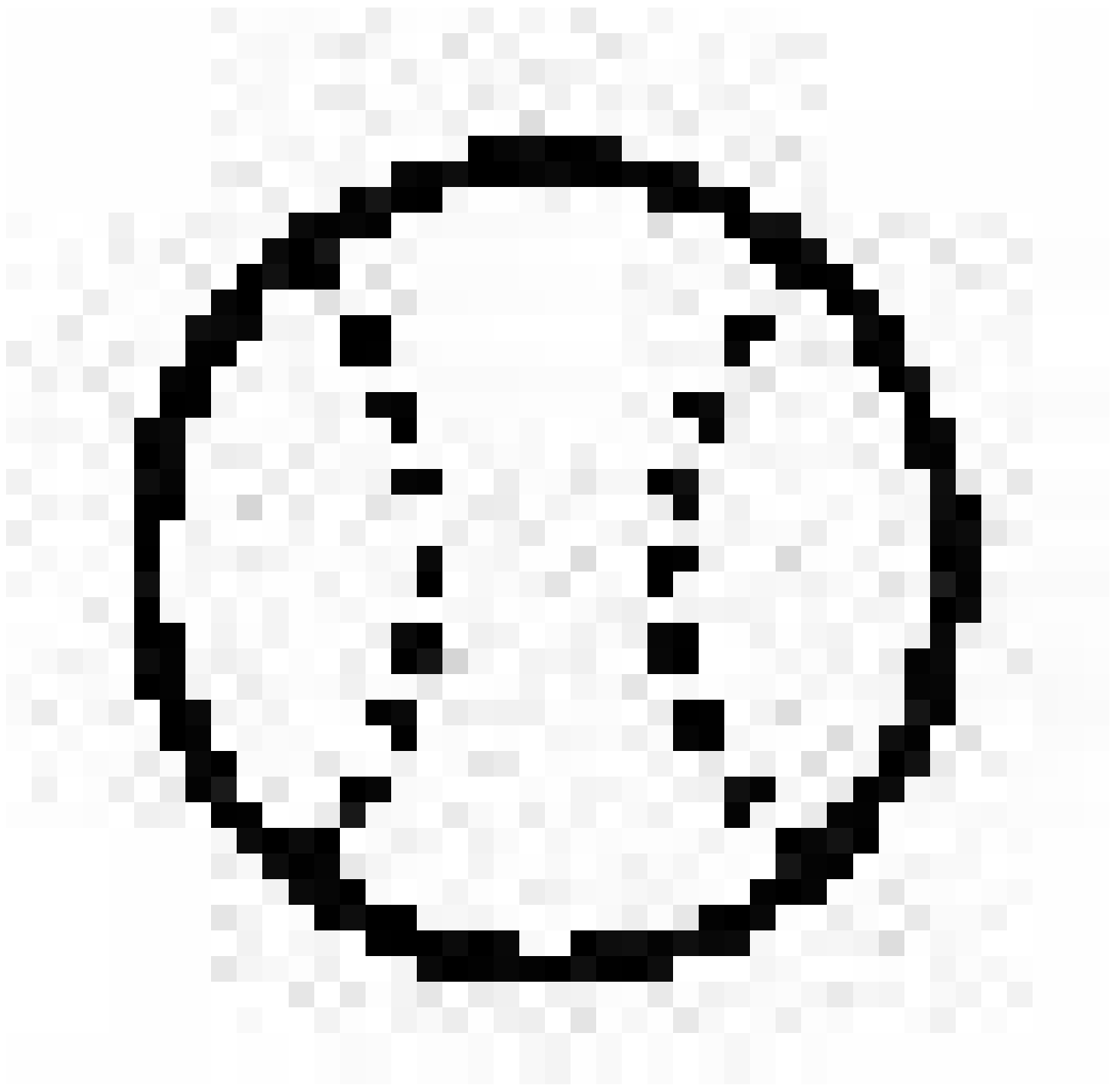
Blackleg walked off, waving in pardon. A moment later, men in suits appeared and surrounded Chegar. They were the police.

It was a complete failure.

Dammit, Chegar cursed quietly.

He could do nothing except to resentfully watch the man's yellow figure vanish into the station.

Chegar slowly raised both his hands in front of the men approaching him.



When Siva woke up, Chegar had already sent over his payment. With this, one job had finished. Siva did not have any other jobs at the moment, so he could spend his time however he pleased.

“.....Now then, who should I play with next?”

He carefully looked through his target options while talking to himself. His attention was grabbed when he saw a beginner bikini model as he looked through the celebrity news. The girl apparently started gradually getting popularity after appearing in a drama series.

Siva looked up information on the pin-up girl. She always wore clothing that emphasized her breasts for work. She seemed to sell this pure and innocent image, although it was a bit unreasonable.

This was it. She would be his next target. It was always the trivial details that made him choose his targets. Siva did not really care who the target was, as long as they had a charming life.

This time, he decided to make a mess of this female performer's life. He looked through her posts on social media in the past. She mainly had posts with no content. She had hung out with so and so. Her weight increased by one kilogram. She was concerned with her dry skin. Siva could care less.

"Ah, we can't have this." Siva grinned and typed on his keyboard. "We need something more shocking to talk about."

It was an easy task for him to take over her account with his hacking skills. Once he got past the ID and password and got in, he pretended to be her and wrote a post.

'I had a fight with my boyfriend.....This is the worst.'

This message would spread like wildfire. Siva looked forward to her fans' reactions. Some of them would look at this message and burst into tears. Her agency would be pushed to dismiss her.

What should I say next? Anything would do, as long as it's something to cause her to grow a negative image. Maybe something like 'my blind date was fun,' or 'I was caught two-timing.' Her stupid male fans would fall for this and have a wake up call.

And that would just be getting started. Once her fans begin to wallow in disbelief, I could cause even more of a ruckus by framing her for a crime. I suppose something related to drugs will do. It's not rare for performer's to be discovered doing something related to drugs.

Siva suddenly looked up. Something had appeared in his vision on one of his monitors. He saw his own face reflected in the pitch black screen of the one turned off. But at the edge of the screen, he saw a person-like figure.

Siva's breath caught in his throat, and he turned around in haste.

A man stood at the entrance of the room. A Niwaka mask covered his face.

"Wh-who are you?!"

The door should have been locked. *How did he get inside?* Siva must have been too focused on hacking; he did not notice his arrival. He did not even sense his presence.

Who is this man?

The man spoke. "You look like you're havin' fun."

".....Eh?"

"You sure look like you're havin' fun, toyin' with people's lives."

The man slowly drew closer to him as he said that.

"So you was the culprit after all."

The man held a Japanese sword.

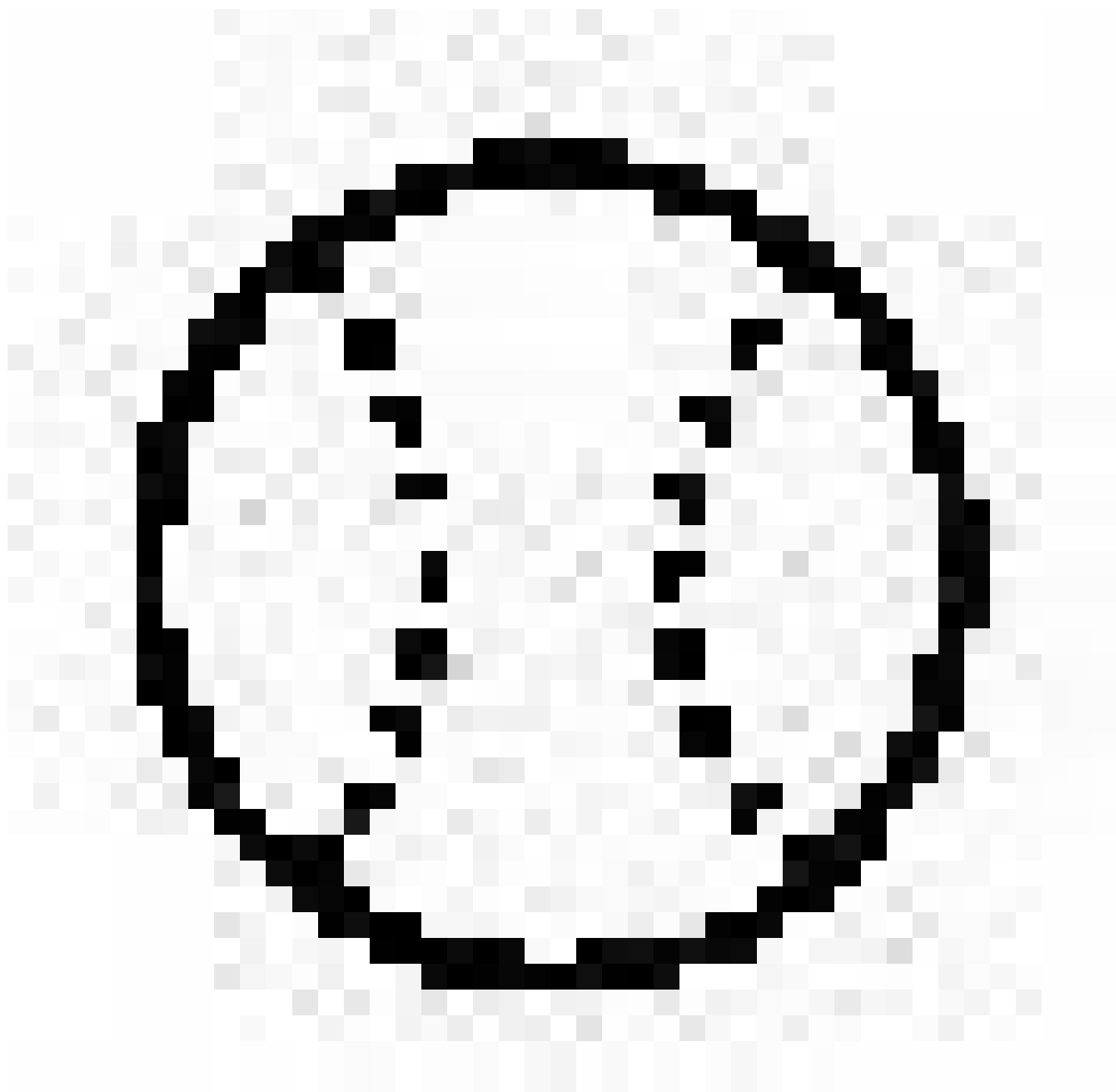
"Ah, aaahh....." Siva paled. "S-stop! Don't come any closer!"

He grabbed the keyboard and threw it at his opponent. The man leaned to the side, easily dodging it and proceeding forward.

Siva knew he was outmatched.

'Hackers are little weaklings without their computers.' Irasawa's words passed through his mind.

The next second, Siva felt a sharp pain in his chest. His vision went pitch black, as though the lights had gone out.



“You did not have to come all the way to the platform to see me off.” Yagi told Enokida apologetically. “Even at my old age, I can at least get on a shinkansen by myself.”

“This is the last time I’ll be seeing your face.” Enokida grinned. “I’ll feel so much better when you’re gone.”

“Oh my, please do not miss me that much.”

“You’re hard of hearing. I guess you couldn’t escape that as you got older.”

Enokida shrugged, handing a paper bag to Yagi.

“Alright, here you go. A little souvenir.”

Inside was fifteen *torimon*.

“Thank you for your assistance.” Yagi accepted the gift and bowed deeply. “Because of you, I can also sleep with peace at mind.”

The case had been solved. Manabu Kuroiwa, also known as macro-hard who had attempted to extort money from Kazuo Matsuda, was no longer in this world. And the .mmm spy and his accomplices who had obtained his data were all going to be behind bars. The information connecting Matsuda and Enokida had been erased as well.

This case was all wrapped up. It should be, but there was one thing that caught Enokida’s attention. It had been bothering him since he started researching into this case.

“Say,” Enokida sat down on the bench on the platform before going on. “Can I ask you one question?”

“Yes, of course. Go ahead.”

“Macro-hard had really looked into that man. He looked through his call history and even his credit card purchase history.”

“He did?”

“There was something strange. Eight years ago, Kazuo Matsuda purchased a plane ticket heading for Fukuoka with his personal credit card.”

Yagi’s complexion slightly changed when Enokida mentioned that.

“What was the meaning behind that?”

Enokida had an idea about that plane ticket bound for Fukuoka from eight years ago. It was the same time as when Yagi had helped him escape.

“Why was that ticket purchased under his name?” Enokida pressed for an answer.

If Yagi had let Enokida escape without Matsuda knowing, it was impossible for him to have used Matsuda’s credit card.

That meant the airplane ticket had been bought by Matsuda himself with his consent.

Yagi smiled and admitted, “I suppose it was about time.” He did not seem like

he planned on hiding the truth from the beginning; he looked like he was happy that Enokida would realize it.

“I believe I had told you back then. That *‘all of this is the master’s orders.’*

“.....What do you mean?”

“I was ordered by the master to let you escape somewhere and fake your death.”

So that was it. Enokida thought it was not possible, but there was nothing else he could think of either.

“Then it was your will to try and kill me back then?”

“No,” Yagi shook his head. “That was also the master’s order. I was told to shoot at you, and of course, miss.”

“Why would he do all that.....?”

“‘He did something wrong, so he should get a repercussion for it.’ That was what the master had suggested. When I reported to him of the puzzled face you made, he was thoroughly pleased.”

“What the heck.” *That man had Yagi pull the trigger on him for a ridiculous reason as that? But Yagi also did follow through with it.*

Enokida made a sullen look. “I suppose the parent and his child are similar in the sense they both like to tease others.” Yagi laughed, his shoulders trembling.

“.....Isn’t that just dumb?” Enokida cursed silently.

Yagi had then quietly told him the truth of back then. ‘He’s an illness. Nothing could cure him.’ Those were the words Enokida had heard in the past. Apparently Matsuda had further to say on that.

‘And that’s why he should be let free.’

“How about visiting home after all this time? It’s going to be the master’s birthday soon, and everyone would be there to celebrate.”

“Yeah, no.” Enokida shot down Yagi’s proposal immediately. “I will never go back to that household.”

Yagi smiled and let out a chuckle. As expected, Enokida was out of his league

against this servant.

The time had come; the shinkansen had arrived. Yagi told him before he got on the train, “young master, please do take care of yourself.” It was the same phrase he used on that day.

The bell for departure rang. The doors shut when it went off, and Yagi went out of sight.

Enokida turned on his heel while glancing from the side to watch the shinkansen take off.

Hero Interview

“Sir, here is your coffee.”

Yagi immediately resumed work upon arriving to the Matsuda household after a week absent. He poured a cup of coffee as usual and brought it to Kazuo’s study. When he put down the tea-cake and the *torimon* treat, his master Kazuo Matsuda asked him, “did you enjoy your trip to Fukuoka?”

“I greatly enjoyed myself.”

Yagi bowed his head readily.

“I received an oracle of great fortune at the Daizaifu Tenmangu Shrine.”

“Really? Glad to hear it.” Kazuo smiled.

Yagi then lowered his voice to give his report. “The case in question has been solved safely, so please rest assured.”

“Is that so? Thank you for your hard work, Yagi.”

“No, not at all. I did not do anything.” Yagi shook his head slightly.

The threats had stopped coming in since that day; no one attempted to extort money from them. The person who used a computer virus to threaten Matsuda with was no longer in this world. The data he held for it was disposed of as well.

“So who was the culprit behind it in the end?”

“Just an ordinary hacker. He seemed to just want a huge sum of money. He was indiscriminately threatening other people as well.”

“Was that it?”

Peace resumed for a time once the seed of worry had vanished. All of this was thanks to that young genius hacker.

‘The young master was doing well,’ Yagi had tried to inform Matsuda but was interrupted. ‘Don’t tell me anything I need to know.’ The man pouted, and from his expression Yagi could tell. Yagi really wanted to tell him, but he withheld

himself.

He had thought that with the past misunderstandings having come to light and after all these years, their stubbornness would have lessened, but the son's temperament did not change. Yagi had tried to invite him to come home occasionally, but it was pointless. He thought he would stop putting up a fight already. But of course, that man was dishonest and unappealing as ever.

These two were unlikely to ever exchange words with each other again. Yagi could only find that disappointing.

He glanced over at his master. Kazuo seemed as busy as ever. Even though today was his birthday, he had no time to take off and celebrate. He had been consistently working even at home as well.

Kazuo took a sip of the coffee Yagi poured for him as he worked on his brand new computer. And then his breath suddenly hitched. Kazuo stared at the screen apprehensively.

"What is this.....?"

Yagi felt weary seeing his expression. "Is something the matter?"

"Look at this."

Yagi did as he was instructed and looked at the screen.

'Kazuo Matsuda.'

Yagi's eyes widened as well when he saw the characters displayed on the screen.

"This is-"

There were white characters on a black screen. It was the exact same as the threat they received earlier.

The air around them instantly became tense.

What is the meaning of this? Did they get another virus again? But the person behind it last time should be dead. Then is this another person's work?

Yagi got ahead of himself to think the case was resolved. Yagi also was neglectful of exactly how many enemies his master had.

After a few moments, there was a movement on the screen.

A sentence was added.

What was displayed was –

‘Kazuo Matsuda.’

‘Happy birthday.’

Yagi was baffled. Today was indeed Kazuo’s birthday. There was only one man he could think of who would pull such a trivial prank as infecting someone’s computer with a virus to send a message wishing someone a happy birthday over a screen.

What an unbelievable man.

He could have chosen normal methods to make contact like making a phone call or sending a card, yet the man chose a roundabout way of doing it. How dishonest.

Yagi accidentally blurted that out. But at the same time, he was relieved. It was not another threat.

“.....That stupid son of mine.”

Kazuo muttered while gazing at the display on his computer. There was a hint of a smile behind the words he said.

At that, the characters changed on the screen.

‘You’re the idiot.’

Immediately a shiver ran down their spines.

How on earth is that man listening in on their conversation?

Yet it was a nostalgic phrase. ‘You’re the idiot.’ Now thinking about it, he had opposed his father like this on a computer back then too. *No matter how much time has passed, he’s still a child.* Yagi shrugged.

The smile vanished from Kazuo’s face. “.....Yagi.”

“Yes?”

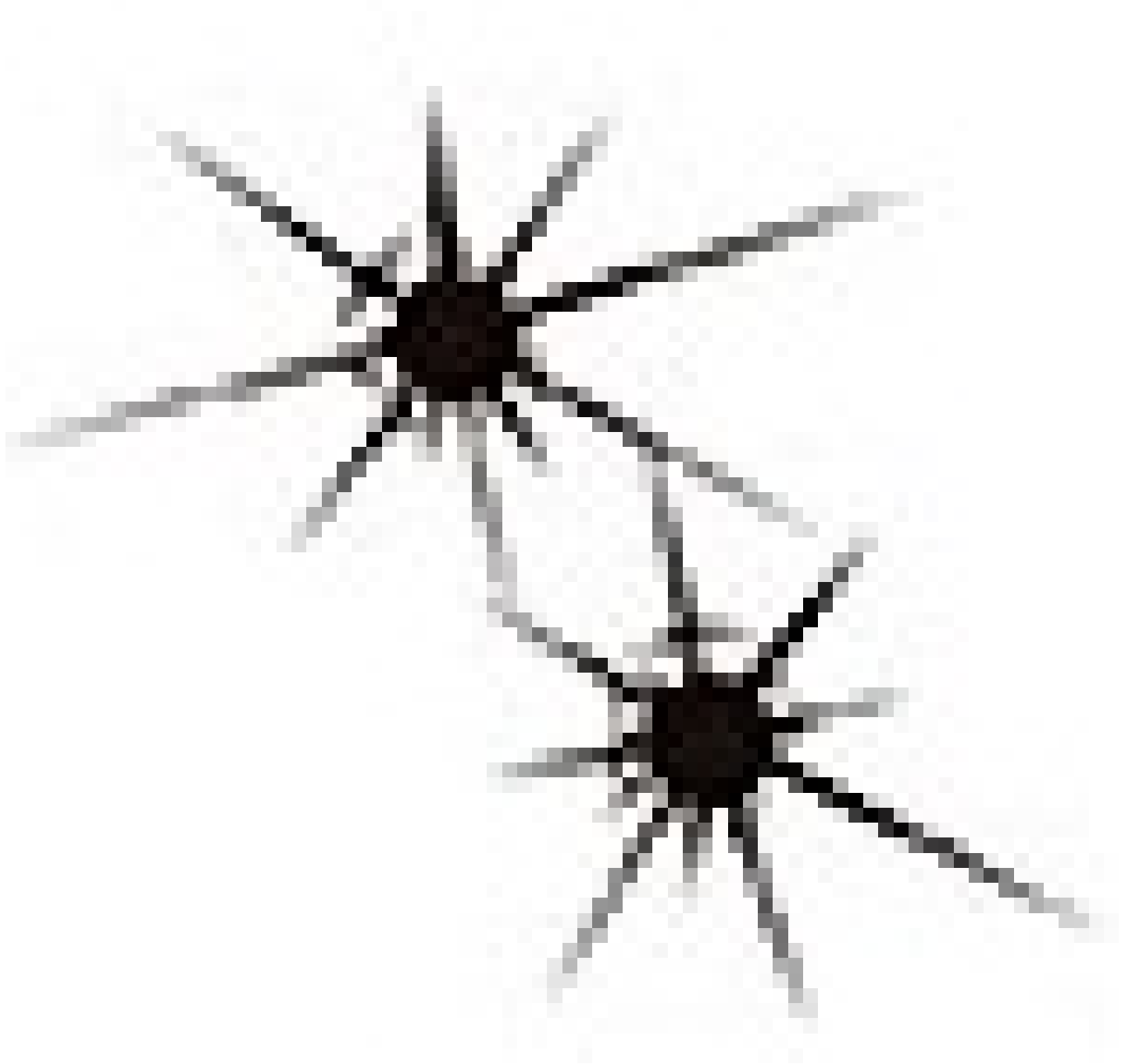
“Look in every nook and cranny to find if there are any bugs in this room.”

“Understood.”

“And then dispose of this computer. Immediately.”

“Alright, sir. Hahaha.”

Yagi held the brand new laptop at his waist with a smile he could not repress.



“Hey,” Martinez addressed him suddenly next to him. He was peeking at his laptop screen. “What are you grinning for?”

Enokida took out his earphones that were connected to his computer and lightly smiled, “just a little something.”

Computers were equipped with a web camera and microphone, which made it easy for him to use to eavesdrop on conversations. A hacker could listen in and observe anything going on by gaining access to a person’s computer

without needing to set up bugs.

“You were probably pulling another dumb prank, weren’t you?”

In fact he was.

“You know me so well,” Enokida smirked, closing his laptop. He felt great now that he accomplished a meager retaliation.

“If you don’t hurry up, there won’t be any meat left.” Martinez glanced over to the net. The meat that was lain out on it was quickly being taken and consumed by the other men.

Right now, they were in the middle of having a feast at a famous yakiniku restaurant along the river in Nakasu. All the nine Ramens members, plus Genzo and Misaki were there, enjoying themselves in the room they reserved for adults.

“Seriously! You got me into more trouble, Enokida-san!” Saitou, sitting diagonally from him, exclaimed. He must have been a bit drunk as he was a little inarticulate. “Why would you do that?!”

Enokida had made Saitou a decoy last time so he could shake the bounty hunters off his trail.

“I said I’m sorry for that. Besides, I made sure to save you.”

“And speaking of that, who was that old man?!”

By ‘that old man,’ he probably meant Yagi. Enokida had him be Saitou’s rescuer. He was reluctant to use him, but there were not enough people he could turn to for that so he ended up using him.

“Yeah, well,” Enokida spoke ambiguously. “He’s an acquaintance of mine.”

At that, Banba and Lin who were sitting across from him looked at each other and grinned.

“He says he’s just some acquaintance, Lin-chan.”

“Seriously? It didn’t look like it to me.”

Banba picked up a cooked piece of meat with the tongs and put it on Enokida’s plate. “Here is your meat, young master.”

Lin picked up the menu and pressed the server call button. “What beverages shall we choose, young master?”

“.....Hey, cut it, you two.” *You stupid midfielders*, Enokida glared at them.

A shop attendee opened the door to the private room shortly after. She was a young woman. Everyone began ordering at once.

“Excuse me, I’d like a draft beer!”

“Ah, me too.”

“So two drafts.”

“I’ll have one too. Three draft beers. And hold it there, young miss, you’re pretty cute. What’s your name?”

“I’ll have the special deluxe roast, the special deluxe beef ribs, and a selection of three tongues.” Enokida listed off the items he wanted, menu in one hand.

“Ah, and can you change the net on the grill?”

“Hey, you’re just choosing all the expensive stuff?” Martinez interrupted the conversation. “You’re sure enjoying the booming economy.”

“Eh? But isn’t it your treat today, Mar-san?”

“Wha-?”

Martinez was wide eyed for a moment. “I guess I’ll have to,” he said after a moment and smiled bitterly.

“I’ll treat you. Today is a celebration after all.”

“A celebration?” Enokida tilted his head in confusion. There was not really anything for them to celebrate just for all of them being here tonight. “What for?”

“The usual celebration of a parent and child making up.”

Enokida fell silent at that statement. Martinez must have figured out what he was doing when he looked at his laptop earlier.

Enokida replied back in a murmur. “.....We didn’t really make up or anything.”

“Oh, my apologies!” Martinez grinned. “Please eat whatever you like then,

young master.”

“I said cut it out.”

After Enokida pouted at him, he stuffed his mouth with two stripes of beef ribs.

GAME SET



Translation Notes:

- Tenmangu Shrines are built across a few areas in Japan, which are all dedicated to a scholar and politician of the Heian Period – Sugawara Michizane. This shrine is the most popular site for tourists to visit in Dazaifu. [View more about it here](#).
- It's very uncommon in the States, but in Japan you can eat cow tongue. It's not extremely common in Japan cuisine, but it is available, and it's more popular in the Sendai area specifically. Outside of Sendai, they are often at yakiniku restaurants. The name is known as *Gyuutan* (牛タン).

Afterword

“You’re so persistent on this!” You may think, but this is just in case. This work is a humanitarian crime-grass lot baseball novel which takes place in a fiction world that is ‘a slightly dangerous Fukuoka.’ The names of real people, places, or events have no correlation with this work, so please be informed.

In the third novel we completed Xianming Lin’s turmoil, and I was going to have him undergo new feelings in the fourth volume, but then what I heard from my editor was, “have Enokida be the main lead in the next volume.” I never thought to have Enokida as the main component, so feeling like I was told “have Enokida fourth up in the next match” if I counted it in baseball terms, I racked my brain over what to do everyday. I felt like Enokida shone on the sidelines. And so to have him be the fourth batter up as a main lead, how should I have him act.....is what I pondered to myself.

After struggling what to do, I went to a shady fortune teller while lost in Chinatown, Yokohama, and I asked them to tell me what I should write.

Their answer was ‘don’t do love.’

“Ah, I think I’m okay then.” I said.

The fortune teller then pulled out a tarot card and told me, “This is the swords card. A story of fighting will do. Do a story where people die brutally.”

“Okay! Thank you so much!” And I paid them three thousand yen and came back to Fukuoka exultantly, but when I thought about it I always write “fighting” and “people dying,” so the days wondering what I should do persisted.

And with that, this became a story centered around Enokida. I hope any of you who liked Enokida from the start or those that didn’t have come to like him a bit more after reading this.

A lot of people have helped in making this. I deeply thank each person who has put in their efforts in making this happen: my editors Wada-sama and Endou-sama, the illustrator Hako Ichiro-sama, the proofreaders, the designers, and the fortune teller.

And lastly, to the readers who purchased this book. As always, thank you. And I'm pleased to announce this series will be a manga as well, so please look out to see the Tonkotsu Nine in the manga! Thank you!

Chiaki Kisaki